

**GOD ALONGSIDE US:
KARL BARTH'S REFORM OF JOHN CALVIN'S
THEOLOGICAL METHOD AND THE DOCTRINE OF
DIVINE PROVIDENCE**

by

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To: Heike, Jim, Kelli, Trish, C. and M. --

you walk the walk

"The method of Reformed theology can best be described as a relentless wrestling with the divine revelation in the full context of the church and of life."

-- John Leith, *Introduction to Reformed Theology*

ABBREVIATIONS

Throughout this dissertation, Calvin's *Institutes* refers to the 1559 edition, the Library of Christian Classics, vols. XX and XXI, ed., J.T. McNeill, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1960, and will be designated with Book, Chapter and Section, as, for example, I.16.1. The citations from Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics* are designated with Volume, Book and page number, as, for example, III/3/234. A listing of the *Church Dogmatics* is found in the Bibliography.

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INTRODUCTION

Is the doctrine of the providence of God credible today? With the advent of modern science and technology which places the world at human fingertips, with the feeling that the world is moving too fast to keep up with and humanity has lost all grounding and has no control over its life and destiny, and with the all too human cry to a God who not only does not care but seems to be totally absent, it is no wonder that humanity has given up any notion of divine providence. Would it make any difference to believe in providence any way? If human beings cannot relate to any notion of a providential care of the universe, why believe in providence at all?

One of the most intriguing recent attempts to make sense of the doctrine of providence is Langdon Gilkey's book, *Reaping the Whirlwind*.¹ For Gilkey, "[t]ime and change set the limiting frame for all of human reflection on the being which we experience and know."² Change, the modern "experience of flux and passage in the social world around us",³ has become the controlling element in human life and history. Far from "the experience of former historical epochs"⁴ when the general wax and wane of human experience and life was decidedly more calm and placid, "so that the sense of continuity was dominant"⁵, change has become the "norm" for human existence, the one element which is certain in human life. In Gilkey's methodology, this experience of change has become the crucial human experience which must control all thinking about humanity and, more importantly, God.

It is, first, the modern human experience of change which marks

our epoch off from earlier peoples. The early Greeks, according to Gilkey, viewed life in static and unchanging forms. The most important concept in philosophy was "change within unchanging forms".⁶ Life in all its entities change, as human beings as individuals change, but the essential forms did not change.

Christianity, and indeed all of humanity until the 16th and 17th centuries, maintained this understanding of change and history. Life lived under God maintained certain unalterable forms, forms which progressed from one generation to another. Change, if any, came in such small increments that generations could go by without it hardly being noticeable.

With the rise of the new sciences in the 16th and 17th centuries, and of course subsequent developments in the more recent centuries, the "relation of the forms of life to the process of time and of change" was radically altered.⁷ The understanding of life as changeless forms which were all important was found to be inherently wrong and useless. Change and possibility became positive rather than negative, and history

could now be seen as meaningful *because* it manifests a succession of relative and transient forms, rather than because it was the reiteration of permanent, changeless and so absolute forms....The forms of individual and social life -- its economic practices, its political structures, its social hierarchies -- are now seen to be themselves part of the dynamic, transitory and changing aspect of history, rather than elements of its changeless structure. Whatever else in history is essential, universal and absolute, it is no longer the forms of life we see around us in our social world.⁸

Second, while time and change were becoming important, the Copernican revolution also dictated that human beings were no longer the centre of their universe. Suddenly, humanity's relationship to

the world changed. "If one asks about the reason [for the urgency of this question of humanity], one can point to the fact that, owing to the new understanding of nature and the world, humanity was displaced from their central role they thought self-evident, which they assumed from the thinking of the Middle Ages."⁹ When the earth was put out of its place as the centre of the universe, human beings were too, and, as a natural corollary, humanity wondered if they were no longer the centre of God's universe. If no longer the centre of God's universe, what was their place in the scheme of things? Were they of any worth? Was anybody looking out for them? Was there any order in the universe at all? What was the purpose of the human being in the universe after all, if no longer its centre? Were human beings simply a footnote to history?

The radical relativity which was now evident was thoroughgoing. It invaded every aspect of reality. Not only is history not the "embodiment and then dissolution of changeless ... forms..., [but] manifests continually changing, contingent, particular and evanescent forms....",¹⁰ but human beings exist within history in a different way than before. History and the universe no longer contain meaning in and of themselves, in unchanging forms, and thus humanity must look elsewhere to find meaning for itself. If meaning of or within history can no longer be found in changeless forms or a natural order or progression to history or the universe, where is meaning to be found?

Before trying to answer that question directly, it is important to see the other challenges to human life that are different for this epoch as opposed to former ones. Added to the realities of change and the fact that humanity is no longer the centre of the universe is the

fact that, third, human autonomy has risen dramatically, for if change is basic to reality, human beings are going to be faced with the choices that change brings. Humanity now views the world in terms of choices and alternatives rather than static and permanent structures. The human person now sees her or himself as a creator rather than simply a re-creator because she or he has options and alternatives with which to make decisions.

At the same time, "dialectically related" to this sense of autonomy and freedom, "has appeared an increasing sense of the rule of law over historical existence, i.e., of regularities within the sequences of events which are both universal in scope and necessary in character."¹² Faced with the radical alternative of autonomy, humanity also found a rule of law which grounded all things. Both were necessary, as people could hope to change the world with their creative freedom as long as life stayed within certain laws which were understandable and able to be used. Humanity could face the reality of having to make decisions without the knowledge of God-ordained choices as they found another ground which could not be moved or shaken on which to base their decisions.¹³

Fourth, not only has change brought autonomy, but, as we have seen with the rise of modern science, history is now understood naturalistically. History and the structures it holds have been desacralized.¹⁴ "Permanent and absolute structures of life have gone, leaving relative forms that come and go as circumstances and the human response to them dictate."¹⁵ "History is suddenly open to human reshaping".¹⁶ Thus, humanity is now able to look at political and social structures and make changes and decisions, not on the basis of

an arbitrary will guiding them, but on their own understanding of what and how they want to live.

As the desacralization of nature prepared the way for technology, so the comparable desacralization of history in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries prepared the way for political action to transform the social structures that are now seen to be relative. Only when social structures were understood to be *historical*, products of relative, finite factors, could they be legitimately the objects of secular and moral criticism and could the hope of their historical transformation become a possibility.¹⁷

Along with change, autonomy, the rule of law and the naturalistic understanding of history, there is a fifth and final element that directly effects our modern understanding of humanity and history. With entities being creative and autonomous, time and temporality now become *the locus*. "Temporal passage, then, the movement of events from possibility to actuality, is fundamental to the becoming of being."¹⁸

Time, therefore, is no longer subsidiary to any other realm beyond itself from which creation of the new arises, a moving image of an eternity already fashioned; nor can it be the unfolding of a prior, static divine plan. Time not eternity is the place where being and actuality happen; and thus the future is not "there" as actual in its definite and shaped form either in eternity or in the prescience of God. Rather, temporal passage as it moves forward is itself the arena, and the sole arena to our knowledge, where actuality comes to be in the particular form it is. Before they occur events are at best "possible"; only when they occur are events actual. The future, therefore, is *only* possibility, the present alone where actuality is.¹⁹

The two important corollaries which stem from this "radical temporalizing of being"²⁰ are the fact that the future is open and that "God's being itself must...share in temporality...."²¹ With time the important element, one must admit the fact that all entities move from possibility to actuality, that humanity must live within this fact, and that *God* must share in this as well. As we can readily

imagine, this has crucial implications for the Calvinist notions of "foresight" and "foreknowledge", for if the future is possibility and not actuality, and human creative freedom something to be preserved, then even God cannot *foreknow* as has been postulated about God in the past. "Thus, becoming and being in the divine life must be much more essentially intermixed than heretofore in the Christian tradition."²²

In summary, change and temporality is at the core of our being and of history, and the modern historical consciousness, which emphasizes contingency, relativity, transience and autonomy, is the way modern humanity understands and experiences history and the flow of historical events.

With this enormously fluctuating idea of history and the relativity and transience of human life, Gilkey believes human beings must find meaning in history by re-interpreting biblical symbols to address this modern understanding and experience of history. The biblical symbols must be re-interpreted to address modern humanity in terms that give meaning to their experience of history. The Christian symbols must be re-interpreted to give meaning to history as moderns know history.²³

Langdon Gilkey, therefore, definitely has an argument with Reformed theology and its founder, John Calvin, at a most basic point: the divine sovereignty which supports the divine providence.

The traditional view of the divine providence spoke of God's sustaining and ordaining work in history: the preservation of the creatures God had brought into being; the sovereign ordination of the forms of life, economic, political and social; finally, the sovereign ordination of the intentions and acts that the creatures achieved and of the events which they underwent. Here, let us note, is the model of the omnipotent ruler of past, present and future against which most of modernity has violently reacted.²⁴

*This concept of the all-determining sovereign of past and present events runs counter to almost every facet of the modern consciousness of history.*²⁵

Because of the modern historical consciousness of contingency, relativity, transience and autonomy, Gilkey argues that "we all see history as a fabric woven by human creativity, error and sin, not as a pattern laid out by God."²⁶ His aim is to "try to reinterpret this traditional absolutist view of the divine sovereignty in the forms of our historical experience."²⁷ His argument with Calvin is that Calvin's doctrine of providence and his understanding of history cannot be presented as realistic for modern humanity. Because Calvin's doctrine of providence relies on a doctrine of God which is no longer viable in the modern world, because it cannot take into account the modern experience of change, temporality, history and the modern historical consciousness, certain aspects of Calvin's doctrine of providence are simply out of date and no longer viable. The doctrine of providence and its grounding, the doctrine of God, must change as human experience of history changes. The Christian symbols must be re-interpreted to become meaningful and useful.

For the Christian community...the final answer to this...question of ultimate sovereignty in history...is expressed most fully in terms of Christian symbols....In any case, in part at least it is *this* experience of the ultimate dimension within which history moves in our daily political and communal life, and so this experience of the wonder and yet the terror of history, that the biblical symbols of God's sovereign action in history mean or have reference to in our ordinary experience.²⁸

While John Calvin is the one to whom we look for a basic understanding of Reformed Christianity, Gilkey is correct in pointing out that modern humanity finds it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to believe and live as if Calvin's doctrine of the

providence of God were a viable one. Modern humanity does not live pre-Copernicus nor pre-Enlightenment. On the contrary, it lives in a scientific, technological, post-Enlightenment world. It has endured a century of wars and pogroms which at times seems endless, lives under the continual threat of nuclear annihilation and daily discovered diseases, and consequently looks forward to the next century with an understandably jaundiced eye. One cannot acknowledge and experience these elements of modern life and not be changed.

Must modern humanity, however, and indeed modern Reformed theology, jump from an "all-determining sovereign of past and present events"²⁹ to one which is as changing and free-floating as human experience itself? Can Reformed Christianity, in the tradition of John Calvin but also post-Enlightenment, speak to modern humanity, beset by modern problems, while maintaining its integrity with respect to the sovereignty of God and God's providential caring for the world? *Must modern humanity give up the sovereignty of God in order to make sense of its own experience?*

No. In the Reformed understanding of the Christian faith the sovereignty of God is primary. What must be done, however, is to maintain our reform, our reformation, to forge the Christian witness in every generation. This will not mean changing God to suit our purposes. It will mean understanding God's sovereignty and providence anew.

Probably the most influential Reformed theologian of the modern era has been the Swiss, Karl Barth. While a committed theologian in the Reformed tradition and an adherent of Calvin's theology, Barth is as post-Copernican and post-Enlightenment as Gilkey himself. He, too,

lived with wars, pogroms, and the threat of nuclear annihilation and diseases. He, too, had to come to grips with the fact that humanity, in the 20th century, is fractured by constant and consistent change. He was all too aware of the modern human experience of a world moving too fast and losing all sense of grounding and control.

Taking into account this modern experience, for Barth sees the same world that Gilkey does, Barth is in a better position to answer Gilkey than Calvin. While standing firmly within the Reformed tradition, Barth is also post-Copernican and post-Enlightenment, and thus has a doctrine of providence which reforms Calvin. He fundamentally agrees with Calvin on the ultimacy of the sovereignty of God, and that no human understanding of God's providence can stem from a human experience of history, from any modern historical consciousness, nor from an experience of change. As Reformed theologians, Barth and Calvin agree that the heart of the Reformed understanding of providence rests upon its conviction that God is sovereign over human affairs and world occurrence generally, guiding and controlling the unfolding of events in such a way as to bring them to ends which suit his purposes. The providence of God is just that, the providence of God. It stems from and can only be defined by God.

While agreeing with Calvin on the sovereignty of God, Barth is, nevertheless, in a decidedly better position to answer Gilkey than Calvin, and as a result reforms Calvin's doctrine of the providence of God. By discussing the doctrine of providence with a post-Enlightenment understanding not only of the human questions concerning history and human existence, but also of how humanity arrives at the knowledge of God and thus the doctrines of God and election, God's

revelation as seen in the life, death and resurrection in Jesus Christ will be seen clearly as the one, unique in kind,³⁰ revelation of God through which humanity gains a knowledge of God. Barth's argument concerns the questions, Who is this God whose providence we are discussing? What is the nature of this God? What is the shape of this God's interaction with the cosmos and perhaps more practically, how do we find out about this God?

Once again, neither Calvin nor Barth would deviate one step from that essential tenet of the Reformed understanding of providence: the sovereignty of God. What is up for discussion is the nature of the God whose sovereignty and providence are affirmed, how we know about this God, and how that God relates to modern humanity living in the post-Enlightenment age. This discussion centres around four areas: philosophy, general revelation, the Word of God and accommodation.

A. Philosophy

We shall see that, although Calvin was a biblical theologian and committed to a theology which proclaimed the gospel through Jesus Christ, he maintained a use of philosophy to such a degree that it coloured his theology, attempts to the contrary notwithstanding. His theology suffered as a result.

What Barth shows is that if the phrase "sovereignty of God" is defined in an abstract way (i.e., without reference to the gracious purposes clearly disclosed in God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ), it remains a philosophical, cosmic principle. A cosmic principle, however, strays from the God known and worshipped in scripture, and the resulting conception of providence is finally indistinguishable

from fate.

For Barth, God can only be truly conceived of as sovereign over history when he is seen in the man Jesus Christ. The God of the Bible for Barth is the "Father of Jesus Christ" who has shown himself in the life, death and resurrection of Christ most truly and uniquely. Only on the basis of the sovereignty of the "Father of Jesus Christ" can a specifically Christian doctrine of providence be developed which proclaims the sovereignty of God while coping with humanity that is fractured with change and whose freedom, more often than not, leaves it out of its own control. The Father we see in Jesus Christ is the only one who can deal seriously with the human predicament and questions of the modern era, and the resulting advance to Reformed theology will only be to its advantage.

B. General Revelation

Calvin's experiential tendency, going against all his best instincts, to build up his doctrine of providence by a process of inferential reasoning, a process which takes as its starting point a series of observations about history and nature, meant that he had a common ground or beginning point with the rest of the world. But it meant that theology began with how we view history and the world order, which Gilkey's theology shows can change from one generation to the next.

By not allowing theology to begin with the world or have any common starting point with the world, whether in nature, the human body, the human mind or history, Barth maintains the radical sovereignty of God that is fundamental for Reformed theology while not

being drawn into the wedge which Gilkey can so easily drive between the modern historical consciousness and Calvin's doctrine of providence. Barth's christocentrism distinguishes him from both Calvin and Gilkey and renders the argument about God's sovereignty and how moderns view history inadequate. By refusing to begin with history or nature, Karl Barth represents a fundamental critique not only of Gilkey but of Calvin. With a christological starting point Barth is true to Reformed christianity and handles Gilkey's emphasis on change and temporality in the modern world.

Calvin remains in the 16th century, pre-Enlightenment, and cannot answer Gilkey, who is post-Enlightenment, who sees change and possibility as positive. But we can no more base our understanding of God on change and possibility than we could on pre-Enlightenment fixedness. Regardless of historical human achievements, we cannot allow our understanding of God to be based on them. We remain in the Reformed tradition, in the line of theology which began with Calvin, because the sovereignty of God is indeed paramount. We must always begin theology with the revelation of God.

Our doctrine of God changes because of the Enlightenment in the sense that God is no longer an unchanging form. But neither is God as changing as human experience itself. Barth's reform of Calvin is located in Barth's doctrine of alongsidedness, which points to the fact that Calvin himself must be reformed because he allowed the Word of God to widen beyond the one Word of God, Jesus Christ. Barth shows that Reformed christians can maintain their integrity as Reformed christians and as moderns. We will see this in Chapters 4-7.

C. Word of God

Calvin's understanding of the Word of God is one which encompasses more than Jesus Christ. It is often found in Old Testament narratives and is much wider. It allows for a discussion of God apart from Jesus Christ. We shall see this more clearly in Chapters 1-3.

By refusing to be drawn into the wedge driven between history and modernity, by stressing the fact that the one, unique in kind, revelation of God is seen in Jesus Christ, by making the question of revelation primary and not the question of the knowledge of God, Barth counteracts all notion of a secret, hidden will in God. There is no secret plan or will in God which God keeps hidden and which we will learn about only when we have been elected to life or damned to death. By showing that revelation is God's threefold unity *ad extra* as it is *ad intra*, that who God is in God's works is no different than who God is in God's self, Barth puts to rest any secret will of God that lurks behind the God we know in Jesus Christ. He also re-establishes revelation as something God does, not human beings. He will not allow any elevation of human concepts or thoughts to the level of revelation. Theology cannot become anthropology.

D. Accommodation

In God's condescending to our human capacity, does God present God's self as different than God is? Is God different towards humanity than God is in God's self?

While in some respects God's accommodation of God's self to humanity is a comforting idea, it will be seen to have dubious

consequences. We will have to ask in what way Christ was an accommodation to us and if we can really trust him. If Christ is simply God's accommodation to humanity, then can we trust Christ to tell us who God really is? Can we trust Christ to be our providence? We will have to ask the climactic question which is the crucial wedge driven between Barth and both Calvin and Gilkey: "Who is Jesus Christ for you?" It will be shown that although Calvin was christological he was not christological enough, and therefore susceptible to the historical critique of Gilkey's.

Barth's vision of Christ as the hub around which all theology must revolve leads us to a deeper understanding of the truly providential God, not only as the one who preserves and governs us but who also walks with us, grounding our autonomy and seeking relationship. It will remain true to Calvin's call for the sovereignty of God. It will also speak to our human questions of meaning in a modern world without making God into our own image.

In order to show that this reform of Calvin's doctrine of providence has occurred, Calvin's doctrines of the knowledge of God, providence and predestination will be the subject of the first half of this dissertation. In these sections an attempt will be made to show that his method of explanation in the doctrine of providence, while a *loci communes* of Scripture references, nevertheless, is not carried out in complete consistency because of his tendency to use pagan philosophy, a tendency that betrayed his best instincts. This use of pagan philosophy, while certainly not the hinge to his doctrines of God or providence, so coloured his theology that both doctrines suffered as a result.

The second half will be a parallel treatment of Barth, showing that his method stems from the fact that the God of the Bible is the Father of Jesus Christ. That affirmation, taken to its full and logical conclusion, will necessitate certain modifications of Calvin's doctrines of God and providence. No longer will God be a cosmic and philosophical principle, but the one who chooses, in solidarity with God's people, to reveal himself to us primarily and fundamentally in Jesus Christ. It is the revelation in Jesus Christ which defines who God is, and in order to be faithful to the Father of Jesus Christ it will be necessary to wrest any pagan philosophy from theology.

The resulting doctrine of providence, far from being one which Langdon Gilkey calls

at best an abstract confession, a belief in a sovereignty that could hardly be made comprehensible, and at worst, a doctrine irrelevant to the inward, personal and so the "real" concerns of faith,³¹

is one which takes seriously all human questions about history and human life, and, at the same time, refuses to worship human history and life. Seen through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Barth's doctrine of the providence of God points to a "power made perfect in weakness", (2Cor.12:9) a providence breathtaking both in its sovereignty and in its humanity. Clearly, neither abstract nor irrelevant. Truly reformed and truly modern.

This dissertation is seeking to argue the point that Karl Barth's doctrine of providence is a reform of John Calvin's. It is concerned only with the Reformed tradition of the Christian faith and is not an attempt to discuss the doctrine of providence throughout the history of Christian theology, nor to discuss the merits of a Reformed

doctrine of providence with respect to any other Christian tradition. Calvin thought is difficult to discern behind the veils and layers of Calvin commentaries. This dissertation looks at Calvin from a Barthian perspective in the latter half of the 20th century and with objections that Barth himself would see.

Also, while realizing that the problems of history, meaning, change, evil, election, and human freedom are all encompassed within the doctrine of providence, this dissertation is seeking only to highlight Barth's reform of Calvin with regard to method and the pastoral implications of providence, namely, God's alonsidedness with humanity. It does not seek to be all-encompassing. Its intention is to show that while Calvin's doctrine of providence cannot cope with the modern human question of human freedom, Reformed theology has nevertheless been advanced by Barth in such a way that it speaks to modern humanity without losing its integrity as *Reformed*. It does not let human experience change ones theology, but has a christocentric theology of which providence is going to be a fundamental aspect. It is Reformed and modern. It is "Reformed and always reforming".

ENDNOTES - INTRODUCTION

¹Langdon Gilkey, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, The Seabury Press, New York, 1981.

²*Ibid.*, p. 3.

³*Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 188.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁹Friedrich Gogarten, "Das Problem einer theologischen Anthropologie", *Zwischen den Zeiten*, 7. 1929. p. 503, my translation.

¹⁰Gilkey, p. 191.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 195.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 195.

¹³Gilkey, p. 195. The idea that there is both autonomy and its related problems is certainly Gilkey's, but one need only listen to modern people and their questions concerning the nature of their relationship to God and history to see and hear both autonomy and the need for its related idea, the rule of law. There is both the struggle with freedom for decisions and the insistence that there is an order to the universe.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 198-9.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 198.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 198.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 198.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 200.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 200.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 201.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 201.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 202.

²²"Humanity as the subject of history, the historical person in the sense of historical power, history in the sense of a formally deciding being, this person, or even more exact the problem of this person, is exactly like the problem of modern thought, also the problem of modern theological thought. From this point it is evident that one looks for the understanding of theological problems in modern theology, that one originates with humanity, that one therefore thinks fundamentally anthropologically." Gogarten, *op. cit.*, p. 504.

²⁴Gilkey, p. 242.

²⁵*Ibid.*, italics added.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 243.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 244.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 57.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 242.

³⁰George Hunsinger, *How To Read Karl Barth*, Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford, 1991. "The noetic procedure is the rule that says, 'Let every concept used in dogmatic theology be defined on the basis of a particular event called Jesus Christ.' No generalities derived from elsewhere are to be applied without further ado to this particular. Instead one must so proceed from this particular event that all general conceptions are carefully and critically redefined on its basis before being used in theology....This particular event requires special conceptualization, precisely because it is regarded as unique in kind." P. 4. This concept will be discussed throughout this dissertation.

³¹Gilkey, p. 226.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD THE CREATOR

Who is this God whose sovereignty and providence Reformed theology makes so essential? How can we find out about this God and how do we know about God's providence? John Calvin treats the doctrine of providence at the end of Book I of the *Institutes*, within his doctrine of the knowledge of God. The location of the doctrine of providence within the doctrine of the knowledge of God the Creator will significantly determine what the doctrine of providence looks like. In later chapters we will see a doctrine of providence located within a doctrine of God the Redeemer and it will pose different questions, but for now let us turn to the knowledge of God the Creator.

How does creation know about God the Creator?' How does God reveal God's self to creation? By looking at the world, or at the heavens with its stars and planets, can one know God? Can God be known through some element within human beings, something which is innate? What does scripture tell us about God? Where in scripture do we look?

Through scripture it is known that God reveals God's self to God's creatures, whether in dialogue or in phenomena that are often not in accord with the norm that human beings accept in the everyday world. Christians also affirm that God reveals God's self through God's son, Jesus Christ, and since his death through the Holy Spirit. The distinction between revelation without Jesus Christ and revelation

through Jesus Christ is called the twofold knowledge of God, the *duplex cognitio domini*.

From the point of view of the knowledge of God, which is the foundation of Calvin's theological writing, Calvin's *Institutes* of 1559 contains two, not four, divisions. Further, *the first and much the smaller of the two is the more general and inclusive, setting the context and proposing the categories within which the latter is to be grasped*. This division corresponds to what Calvin conceived of as the two kinds of revelation: the revelation of God as Creator, and as Redeemer. The short Book I of the 1559 edition represents the former, and the whole remainder of the work represents the latter.²

This is also known as knowledge of God the Creator and knowledge of God the Redeemer, and Calvin speaks of the first in Book I of the *Institutes*, leaving the knowledge of God the Redeemer to the latter three books.

The *duplex cognitio domini* is perhaps the most important element in beginning to understand Calvin's view of the knowledge of God the Creator, to say nothing of the fact that it impacts the rest of his theology.³

Throughout Book I of the *Institutes* Calvin repeatedly emphasizes the fact that he has not come to the knowledge of God the Redeemer, but is understanding God solely as the Creator and wanting to know all that that can tell us. As early as the second chapter of Book I he says,

First, as much in the fashioning of the universe as in the general teaching of Scripture the Lord shows himself to be simply the Creator. Then in the face of Christ he shows himself the Redeemer. Of the resulting twofold knowledge of God we shall now discuss the first aspect; the second will be dealt with in its proper place.⁴

One can easily make the assessment that this sets out the structure for the whole of the *Institutes*, for not only does he set out his

intention of looking first at God the Creator and leaving God the Redeemer "in its proper place", but he also says:

...it is one thing to feel that God as our Maker supports us by his power, governs us by his providence, nourishes us by his goodness, and attends us with all sorts of blessings -- and another thing to embrace the grace of reconciliation offered to us in Christ.⁵

Later he says:

First in order came that kind of knowledge by which one is permitted to grasp who that God is who founded and governs the universe. Then that other inner knowledge was added, which alone quickens dead souls, whereby God is known not only as the Founder of the universe and the sole Author and Ruler of all that is made, but also in the person of the Mediator as the Redeemer.⁶

And:

My readers therefore should remember that I am not yet going to discuss that covenant by which God adopted to himself the sons of Abraham, or that part of doctrine which has always separated believers from unbelieving folk, for it was founded in Christ. But here I shall discuss only how we should learn from Scripture that God, the Creator of the universe, can by sure marks be distinguished from all the throng of feigned gods.⁷

And in I.14.20. Calvin says:

Meanwhile let us not be ashamed to take pious delight in the works of God open and manifest in this most beautiful theater. For, as I have elsewhere said, although it is not the chief evidence for faith, yet it is the first evidence in the order of nature, to be mindful that wherever we cast our eyes, all things they meet are works of God, and at the same time to ponder with pious meditation to what end God created them. Therefore, that we may apprehend with true faith what it profits us to know of God, it is important for us to grasp first the history of the creation of the universe, as it has been set forth briefly by Moses....⁸

Thus it is evident that Calvin uses the *duplex cognitio domini* in his division of the doctrine of the knowledge of God and thus in his theology. It sets the stage for how Calvin understands the relationship between God and the world, and thus for an elucidation of

the knowledge of God the Creator and how God the Creator reveals God's self.

If the question is asked concerning how God the Creator reveals God's self, Calvin answers in two ways: general and special revelation, for knowledge of God the Creator bridges both. "The knowledge of the Creator has two sources: creation and the 'general doctrine' of Scripture; and the knowledge of the Redeemer has one source, Christ."⁹ This division between general and special revelation within the doctrine of the knowledge of God the Creator is crucial.¹⁰ It is important to look at them both, seeking to find out just what is revealed in each.

A. General Revelation

Distinct evidence for the general revelation in creation can be found in Book I, chapters 1-5, in the general revelation of God the Creator in the *sensus divinitatis* and the natural world.¹¹

1. SENSUS DIVINITATIS

Calvin repeatedly speaks of a *sensus divinitatis* that is within each human being.¹² It is "a perception or sensation, an *intelligentia numinis*, and elsewhere a *gustus divinitatis*."¹³ The *sensus divinitatis* is the knowledge of God one is born with; it is innate. "There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, [a] *divinitatis sensum*...To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretense of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty."¹⁴

Men of sound judgment will always be sure that a *divinitatis sensum* which can never be effaced is engraved upon men's minds. Indeed, the perversity of the impious, who though they struggle furiously are unable to extricate themselves

from the fear of God, is abundant testimony that this conviction, namely, that there is some God, is naturally inborn in all, and is fixed deep within, as it were in the very marrow.¹⁵

In this respect Calvin can move widely about in his discussion and speak of this knowledge as something which all people know, whether ignorant or philosopher. He reminds his readers that even Cicero knew that there was "no nation so barbarous, no people so savage, that they have not a deep-seated conviction that there is a God."¹⁶

Besides, if all men are born and live to the end that they may know God, and yet if knowledge of God is unstable and fleeting unless it progresses to this degree, it is clear that all those who do not direct every thought and action in their lives to this goal degenerate from the law of their creation. This was not unknown to the philosophers. Plato meant nothing but this when he often taught that the highest good of the soul is likeness to God, where, when the soul has grasped the knowledge of God, it is wholly transformed into his likeness. In the same manner also Gryllus, in the writings of Plutarch, reasons very skillfully, affirming that, if once religion is absent from their life, men are in no wise superior to brute beasts, but are in many respects far more miserable.¹⁷

It is evident that philosophers have dealt with the question of the *sensus divinitatis* and would have influenced Calvin. Velleius the Epicurean provides an excellent, albeit lengthy, treatise on this very question in Cicero's great work, *De Natura Deorum*.

Any one who should reflect how unthinkingly and recklessly these ideas are advanced, ought to reverence Epicurus and place him among the number of those very beings that form the subject of this inquiry, for it was he alone who perceived, in the first place, the fact of the existence of the gods from the idea of them which nature herself had implanted in all men's minds. For what nation or race of men is there that does not possess, independently of instruction, a certain preconception of them? It is this which Epicurus calls by the name of πρόληψις, that is, a certain idea of a thing formed by the mind beforehand, without which nothing can be understood, or investigated, or discussed.... You see, then, that what constitutes the foundation of this inquiry is excellently well laid, for

since the belief in question was determined by no ordinance, or custom, or law, and since a steadfast unanimity continues to prevail amongst all men without exception, it must be understood that the gods exist. For we have ideas of them implanted, or rather innate, within us, and as that upon which the nature of all men is agreed must needs be true, their existence must be acknowledged. Since their existence is pretty universally admitted not only among philosophers but also among those who are not philosophers, let us own that the following fact is also generally allowed, namely, that we possess a 'preconception,' to use my former word, or 'previous notion' of the gods,...a preconception which makes us think of them as blessed and immortal. For nature that gave us the idea of gods as such, has also engraved in our minds the conviction that they are blessed and eternal.¹⁹

Calvin says "that it is not a doctrine that must first be learned in school, but one of which each of us is master from his mother's womb and which nature itself permits no one to forget...."¹⁹

It must be agreed with Dowey that this *sensus* is in some way numinous, much like Rudolf Otto's understanding.

We are here in the area of the truly numinous in Calvin's theology. This knowledge which is more than knowledge is a suprarational awareness of God's majesty to which man responds in fear. The terror of Caligula is the distortion by sin of that wholesome creature feeling, the religious dread and amazement, *horror et stupor*, which Abraham and Job and Elias felt in the presence of God, and before which 'even the cherubim themselves must veil their faces.'²⁰

As has just been referred to, the *sensus divinitatis* has not remained uncorrupted in humanity. After the Fall, the *sensus divinitatis* became corrupted into idolatry and wickedness.²¹ Although humanity has this *sensus divinitatis* and rightly seeks to worship God, it corrupts this worship into idolatry. It worships whatever it has decided God is. Humanity denies God by fashioning God into whatever it wills, and worships that.

"Indeed, vanity joined with pride can be detected in the fact that, in seeking God, miserable men do not rise above themselves as they should, but measure him by the yardstick of their own carnal stupidity, and neglect sound investigation; thus out of curiosity they fly off into empty

speculations. They do not therefore apprehend God as he offers himself, but imagine him as they have fashioned him in their own presumption.²²

Humanity has also corrupted the *sensus divinitatis* into wickedness and violence against God.

Those who are of a mind alien to God's righteousness know that his judgment seat stands ready to punish transgressions against him, yet they greatly desire its overthrow. Feeling so, they wage war against the Lord, who cannot be without judgment. But while they know that his inescapable power hangs over them because they can neither do away with it nor flee from it, they recoil from it in dread. And so, lest they should everywhere seem to despise him whose majesty weighs upon them, they perform some semblance of religion. Meanwhile they do not desist from polluting themselves with every sort of vice, and from joining wickedness to wickedness, until in every respect they violate the holy law of the Lord and dissipate all his righteousness. Or at least they are not so restrained by that pretended fear of God from wallowing blithely in their own sins and flattering themselves, and preferring to indulge their fleshly intemperance rather than restrain it by the bridle of the Holy Spirit.²³

In summary Calvin says:

From this, my present contention is brought out with greater certainty, that a *Deitatis sensum* is by nature engraven on human hearts....In tranquil times they [the reprobate] wittily joke about God, indeed are facetious and garrulous in belittling his power. If any occasion for despair presses upon them, it goads them to seek him and impels their perfunctory prayers. From this it is clear that they have not been utterly ignorant of God, but that what should have come forth sooner was held back by stubbornness.²⁴

As we shall see, Calvin does not let his doctrine of God the Creator stand on the *sensus divinitatis* alone. It is, however, a crucial element within each human being. However corrupted, it is still present and encourages us to seek God. It is God given. Calvin was sensitive to this element within humankind which speaks of God. It is one element within Calvin's understanding of the general revelation of God the Creator and cannot be dismissed. The

philosophers knew of it; even the ignorant know of it. Although his doctrine of the knowledge of God the Creator cannot stand on the *sensus divinitatis* alone, it is one argument in the total building up of the doctrine. Looking at this through Barthian eyes, a doctrine of providence within a doctrine of the knowledge of God the Creator which includes the *sensus divinitatis* will be a different kind of providence than one based on Jesus Christ. It will not be able to be true to Reformed theology and to confront today's issues.

2. THE NATURAL WORLD

The *sensus divinitatis* is not the only way in which God reveals God's self to humanity. Specific evidence of God's revelation in creation is given in Chapter 5 of Book I, entitled "The Knowledge of God shines forth in the Fashioning of the Universe and the Continuing Government of it".

In chapter 5 Calvin states that everywhere in the universe God's presence and existence are evident, that "wherever you cast your eyes, there is no spot in the universe wherein you cannot discern at least some sparks of his glory."²⁵ God "daily discloses himself in the whole workmanship of the universe. As a consequence, men cannot open their eyes without being compelled to see him."²⁶ This is not innate knowledge, but gained from viewing God's creation.²⁷ Indeed, everything about the world that God created shows off God's work. "David shows how it is that the heavens proclaim to us the glory of God, namely, by openly bearing testimony that they have not been put together by chance, but were wonderfully created by the supreme Architect."²⁸ The heavens show Calvin the greatness of the Creator.

"You cannot in one glance survey this most vast and beautiful system of the universe, in its wide expanse, without being completely overwhelmed by the boundless force of its brightness."²⁹ Even those who are ignorant or "untutored" know this.

There are innumerable evidences both in heaven and on earth that declare his wonderful wisdom; not only those more recondite matters for the closer observation of which astronomy, medicine, and all natural science are intended, but also those which thrust themselves upon the sight of even the most untutored and ignorant persons, so that they cannot open their eyes without being compelled to witness them.³⁰

Even Cicero said this:

Then again, has not human reason reached as far as to the sky? Yes, for we alone of animate beings have learnt the risings and settings and courses of the stars; the day and month and year have been defined by man, and the nature, extent, and date of the eclipses of the sun and moon have been ascertained and foretold for all future time. By contemplation of these things the mind arrives at a knowledge of the gods, from which knowledge springs piety; with piety justice and the other virtues are bound up, and from these a blessed life results, equal and similar to that of the gods, and yielding to that of the heavenly beings in nothing except immortality, which has no connection with right living.³¹

Not only do astronomy and medicine show the glory of God, but the liberal arts³² and the human body itself point to the power of God and God's creation.³³ The human person Calvin calls a "microcosm"³⁴ "because [it] is a rare example of God's power, goodness, and wisdom, and contains within [itself] enough miracles to occupy our minds...."³⁵ There are signs of divinity within human beings. These *divinitatis insignia*, "refer to the signs or evidences within us of God having made us...which stand in the same relation to our subjectivity as the rest of the external world: we observe them, both microcosm and macrocosm, and then look to their Source."³⁶

Manifold indeed is the nimbleness of the soul with which it surveys heaven and earth, joins past to future, retains in memory something heard long before, nay, pictures to itself whatever it pleases. Manifold also is the skill with which it devises things incredible, and which is the mother of so many marvelous devices. These are unfailing signs of divinity [*divinitatis insignia*] in man.... "What ought we to say here except that the signs of immortality which have been implanted in man cannot be effaced?"³⁷

Indeed, everything points to God. "Now I have only wanted to touch upon the fact that this way of seeking God is common both to strangers and to those of his household, if they trace the outlines that above and below sketch a living likeness of him."³⁸

It has quite rightly been noted that Calvin also believes that because of the Fall and sin, humanity cannot see these elements of nature clearly.³⁹ The eyes of humanity have been blinded by sin and the fall, and thus they cannot see them. They render humankind inexcusable.⁴⁰ However:

While it is true that a negative sign stands over the whole revelation in creation in Calvin's theology, we must not allow this sign to erase from our minds the magnitude of the sum thus negated. A negative sign is meaningless before a zero. Man's guilt is meaningless unless it is the persistent negation of the positive revelation which God persistently offers him. God did not stop revealing himself in nature at the Fall. The actual guilt of man in Calvin's theology is the result of actual rejection of an actual revelation that remains clear.⁴¹

It is true that, at the beginning of Book II, Calvin will say that this revelation, both in the natural world and in ourselves, cannot be seen clearly as God's revelation because of the Fall. The *sensus divinitatis* and our ability to see God in God's works in nature have been so corrupted that we cannot truly see him there. Calvin is first and foremost a biblical theologian who sought to expound and explain the word of God as he found it in scripture. We must be

guided by the word of scripture. Calvin, however, can speak of this knowledge of God apart from Jesus Christ, and this has implications, as we shall see.

Calvin, despite his best instincts and his more complete theology, began his doctrine of the knowledge of God with all the elements in nature and ourselves which we ought to be able to use to discern God. For us, this has ramifications for divine providence. Although he later confesses that this cannot now lead us to true knowledge of God, he nevertheless places his doctrine of providence within this doctrine of God the Creator. He consciously chose to arrange his more complete theology this way. To be sure, he places providence within our knowledge of God from scripture. Nevertheless, the fact that he emphasizes that we do not have the perfect knowledge of God from nature and ourselves cannot be disregarded. The fact that he begins with and expends so much energy on a general revelation (in this case apart even from scripture), comprehensible to human eyes or not, confuses and diminishes his more complete theology and does a disservice to the Reformed theology which came later.

Calvin begins his treatment of the doctrine of Reconciliation with the problem of fallen man. It is not self-evident, however, that this should have been his starting place. Calvin has established in Book I of his *Institutes* that the knowledge of God must precede the knowledge of man, and that it is precisely this knowledge of God that has been lost to man, and which now can be recovered only by means of God's Word, faithfully heard. In Christ, that is, we learn what we were *out of* Christ. Would it not have been better, therefore, to begin with the solution rather than with the problem? Would it not have been more consistent with what he says if Calvin had presented the *event* of reconciliation first, and then shown the necessity for reconciliation, a necessity that is only to be understood in the light of the event itself?... Yet in his definitive edition of his *Institutes* Calvin chose to present the doctrine of sin first, with Christology following as the solution to this problem. It may be that

he saw the problem of man's fallen condition as a solved problem, speaking of man-apart-from-Christ from the point of view of man-in-Christ. If that is true, then it is unfortunate that he did not make this clearer in the structure of the *Institutes*, a misfortune to which the history of Protestant theology bears witness.⁴²

B. Word of God

In Book I, Calvin maintains that there are two sources for the knowledge of God the Creator, creation and scripture, and in Chapter 6, Calvin moves from the knowledge of God the Creator found in humanity and the world to the knowledge found in the special revelation of scripture. Because of the fall and human sinfulness, which Calvin will discuss more in depth later on,⁴³ Calvin points out that the spectacles of scripture were added in order to give humanity the eyes to see what they otherwise could not.

Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God.⁴⁴

Yet Calvin points to two kinds of knowledge of God found within scripture. One is the knowledge of God the Creator and the other is knowledge of God the Redeemer.

First in order came that kind of knowledge by which one is permitted to grasp who that God is who founded and governs the universe. Then that other inner knowledge was added, which alone quickens dead souls, whereby God is known not only as the Founder of the universe and the sole Author and Ruler of all that is made, but also in the person of the Mediator as the Redeemer.⁴⁵

He reminds his readers, however, that he is not yet going to speak of God the Redeemer.

But because we have not yet come to the fall of the world and the corruption of nature, I shall now forego discussion of the remedy. My readers therefore should remember that I am not yet going to discuss that covenant by which God adopted to himself the sons of Abraham, or that part of doctrine which has always separated believers from unbelieving folk, for it was founded in Christ. But here I shall discuss only how we should learn from Scripture that God, the Creator of the universe, can by sure marks be distinguished from all the throng of feigned gods.⁴⁶

He admits to the fact that many of his examples will be taken from both the Old and New Testaments, but that the intention is not to prove Christ but to point to the true God the Creator.

We shall derive many testimonies from the New Testament, and other testimonies also from the Law and the Prophets, where express mention is made of Christ. Nevertheless, all things will tend to this end, that God, the Artificer of the universe, is made manifest to us in Scripture, and that what we ought to think of him is set forth there, lest we seek some uncertain deity by devious paths.⁴⁷

And again,

Yet I repeat once more: besides the specific doctrine of faith and repentance that sets forth Christ as Mediator, Scripture adorns with unmistakable marks and tokens the one true God, in that he has created and governs the universe, in order that he may not be mixed up with the throng of false gods.⁴⁸

Clearly, Calvin points to a special revelation found in scripture, the spectacles that allow humanity to see God's revelation. But what do these spectacles allow humanity to see? Outside of chapters 7-9 which are an excursus on the authority of scripture, and 11-12 which are an excursus on the use of images in worship, the rest of Book I contains what is seen through scripture, namely, the Trinity, creation and providence.

The first two sections of Chapter 10 provide the introduction and transition to the special revelation found in scripture, and also come the closest to what might be described as a doctrine of God. In these

two sections Calvin seeks to show that what we have learned already about God, from the universe and ourselves, is found more clearly in scripture. He "ponder[s] whether the Lord represents himself to us in Scripture as we previously saw him delineate himself in his works."⁴⁹ Again, he is interested in knowledge of God the Creator and not Christ. "We, however, are still concerned with that knowledge which stops at the creation of the world, and does not mount up to Christ the Mediator."⁵⁰ To discuss his doctrine of God the Creator according to scripture, he refers to several Old Testament texts. He cites Exodus 34:6-7 as an example of God's

eternity and his self-existence [which] are announced by that wonderful name twice repeated. Thereupon his powers are mentioned, by which he is shown to us not as he is in himself, but as he is toward us: so that this recognition of him consists more in living experience than in vain and high-flown speculation. Now we hear the same powers enumerated there that we have noted as shining in heaven and earth: kindness, goodness, mercy, justice, judgment, and truth. For power and might are contained under the title *Elohim*.⁵¹

He cites Psalm 145 "in which the sum of all his powers is so precisely reckoned up that nothing would seem to have been omitted."⁵² And he cites Jer. 9:24 as showing three crucial aspects of God:

mercy, on which alone the salvation of us all rests; judgment, which is daily exercised against wrongdoers, and in even greater severity awaits them to their everlasting ruin; justice, whereby believers are preserved, and are most tenderly nourished. When these are understood, the prophecy witnesses that you have abundant reason to glory in God. Yet neither his truth, nor power, nor holiness, nor goodness is thus overlooked. For how could we have the requisite knowledge of his justice, mercy, and judgment unless that knowledge rested upon his unbending truth? And without understanding his power, how could we believe that he rules the earth in judgment and justice? But whence comes his mercy save from his goodness? If, finally, "all his paths are mercy" [Ps. 25:10], judgment, justice [cf. Ps. 25:8-9], in these also is his holiness visible.⁵³

As early as Book I, Chapter 1, Calvin was content to reveal the attributes of God. "Suppose we but once begin to raise our thoughts to God, and to ponder his nature, and how completely perfect are his righteousness, wisdom, and power - the straightedge to which we must be shaped."⁵⁴

These attributes of God are of God the Creator. From a 20th century perspective, Calvin builds up his doctrine of God the Creator by looking both to the universe and to scripture, though without Christ. This has implications for his doctrine of providence.

But even if it shall be worth-while a little later to cite certain passages from the New Testament, in which the power of God the Creator and of his providence in the preservation of the primal nature are proved, yet I wish to warn my readers what I now intend to do, lest they overleap the limits set for them. Finally, at present let it be enough to grasp how God the Maker of heaven and earth, governs the universe founded by him. Indeed, both his fatherly goodness and his beneficently inclined will are repeatedly extolled; and examples of his severity are given, which show him to be the righteous avenger of evil deeds, especially where his forbearance toward the obstinate is of no effect.⁵⁵

Calvin seeks to show God's providence, both here and in 1.16-18, in the world and in scripture, but without Christ. God, as Calvin presents him here, is the maker and founder of the universe who has certain attributes -- goodness, kindness, justice, judgment. These attributes are found by looking at the universe and looking at scripture without looking at Christ. The Bible reveals God directly. We do not have to go through Christ because Calvin takes biblical statements as directly revelatory of God.

Calvin splits his doctrine of God into doctrines of the Creator and Redeemer, and this has crucial consequences for our understanding of God. God can be spoken of in terms of attributes considered apart

from Christ. God can also be shown to be different in himself than God is towards us. "Thereupon his powers are mentioned, by which he is shown to us not as he is in himself, but as he is toward us...."⁵⁶ For Barth, a Creator who can be considered apart from the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, will be a God of attributes rather than the Father of Jesus Christ; the God of attributes rather than Abba. Thus the Creator God is considered apart from the Redeemer God. Calvin can do this because he has an understanding of the Word of God which encompasses all of scripture. Calvin can begin with scripture apart from Christ.

A God different in God's self than who God is towards God's creatures will be a hidden God whom human beings cannot truly know or trust. This cannot help but form an understanding of providence which will remain aloof and uncertain, a providence which humanity cannot trust. This was not Calvin's intention, but the inevitable result of the structure of his doctrine of God as Creator and Redeemer.⁵⁷

In this section Calvin has sought, albeit concisely, to show that the knowledge of God the Creator found in scripture is the same as the knowledge found in creation. He has cited several examples of the attributes of God found in scripture which he believes shows evidence that the knowledge of God found in scripture and in creation is the same. Thus he can say, "Indeed, the knowledge of God set forth for us in Scripture is destined for the very same goal as the knowledge whose imprint shines in his creatures, in that it invites us first to fear God, then to trust in him."⁵⁸ This short section correlating the two places where knowledge of God the Creator is found serves to thrust the reader into the next sections on the knowledge of God the Creator found in scripture, knowing that this is no other God but the same one

he has been describing.

1. TRINITY

Calvin's method of explaining and defending the doctrine of the Trinity is to assemble many evidences from scripture. This has traditionally been called the *loci communes* method, one which gathers together relevant quotes from common places which point to what is being proven.

Beginning with the need for an explanation of the non-Biblical words used to describe the Trinity, Calvin draws from both scripture and tradition to explain them. He expounds on such words as hypostasis, essence, trinity, person, homoousios and consubstantial, all in an effort to show the necessity of the doctrine.⁵⁹

When discussing the specific elements as the Son and Spirit, Calvin draws from all over scripture to prove and explain each one. He uses Genesis, Exodus, Judges, Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Zechariah, Malachi, Matthew, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Cor., 2 Cor., Galatians, Ephesians, 1 Timothy, Hebrews, James, and 1 Peter to build up and describe his insistence on the eternal deity of the Son. The Holy Spirit, as well, he explains through the use of scripture: Genesis, Exodus, Psalms, Isaiah, Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, Romans, 1 Cor., 2 Cor., and 2 Peter all play a part.

It has been noted that the explanation of the divinity of the eternal Son does not discuss Calvin's christology.⁶⁰ This is true. "Further, I do not yet touch upon the person of the Mediator, but postpone it until we reach the treatment of redemption."⁶¹ Calvin seeks to treat only the eternal deity of the Son, the fact that the

Son is eternal with the Father. He separates his treatment of the eternal Son from the Mediator.⁵² They are different endeavours altogether.

In essence Calvin says he agrees with Gregory of Nazianzus' statement that "I cannot think on the one without quickly being encircled by the splendor of the three; nor can I discern the three without being straightway carried back to the one."⁵³ He considers the oneness vital, yet also reminds his readers that

to the Father is attributed the beginning of activity, and the fountain and wellspring of all things; to the Son, wisdom, counsel, and the ordered disposition of all things; but to the Spirit is assigned the power and efficacy of that activity.⁵⁴

Calvin seeks to maintain the traditional Nicean definition of the Trinity, showing that it is through explanation and use of scripture that both the non-Biblical terminology is correct and that scripture is the grounding for the doctrine.⁵⁵

Even in the doctrine of the Trinity, however, Calvin has split God in two. By considering the eternal Son apart from the Mediator, Calvin can speak of the Creator without the Redeemer. From a Barthian perspective, the splitting of God in two again has consequences. If we consider the eternal Son apart from the Mediator, then we can say that the real and true God can be known apart from Christ. We know certain things about the eternal Son because of scripture but not because of the Mediator. Thus, the real and true God is hidden and all we know of God's works can never show us who God really is. God's sovereignty and providence are divorced from the Mediator, the Redeemer. We are left with two gods, or perhaps two wills within the one God, one hidden and one revealed. We will be taking up this argument more closely as we go

along.

Now that Calvin has shown his doctrine of the Trinity, he can move to what the Trinity made, creation.

2. CREATION

In Chapters 14 and 15 Calvin deals directly with creation from the special revelation of scripture, and affirms that God created the world out of nothing and has made everything that is on the earth.⁶⁶ He also summarizes exactly what is apprehended in the knowledge of God the Creator if one has faith, "if they [the readers] first of all follow the universal rule, not to pass over in ungrateful thoughtlessness or forgetfulness those conspicuous powers which God shows forth in his creatures, and then learn so to apply it to themselves that their very hearts are touched."⁶⁷

The first part of the rule is exemplified when we reflect upon the greatness of the Artificer who stationed, arranged, and fitted together the starry host of heaven in such wonderful order that nothing more beautiful in appearance can be imagined; who so set and fixed some in their stations that they cannot move; who granted to others a freer course; who so adjusted the motion of all that days and nights, months, years, and seasons of the year are measured off; who so proportioned the inequality of days, which we daily observe, that no confusion occurs. It is so too when we observe his power in sustaining so great a mass, in governing the swiftly revolving heavenly system, and the like. For these few examples make sufficiently clear what it is to recognize God's powers in the creation of the universe.⁶⁸

Thus he also adds:

There remains the second part of the rule, most closely related to faith. It is to recognize that God has destined all things for our good and salvation but at the same time to feel his power and grace in ourselves and in the great benefits he has conferred upon us, and so bestir ourselves to trust, invoke, praise, and love him.⁶⁹

Calvin also discusses angels and devils as a part of creation,

although devils were created good and ruined themselves.⁷⁰ He is mostly concerned with answering questions which the common people would have, especially with regard to guardian angels and how God makes use of angels. In the sections concerning devils, Calvin is concerned with not only explaining devils but also relieving the minds of believers who think that they might be irrevocably harmed by such beings. Calvin, in I.14.17-18, affirms that devils are always under God's power and thus can do nothing with^{at}_^ God's consent and power, and that in the end it is God who wins over these devils. Thus believers need have no worries about their ultimate salvation.

Chapter 15 is Calvin's attempt to discuss human nature both before and after the Fall, and an attempt at understanding the image of God which is quite different from philosophers.

The third and last element of the knowledge of God the Creator through special revelation is providence. While Chapter 2 will explain it in greater detail, it is necessary to take a brief look at it here.

3. PROVIDENCE

Yet a third way in which God the Creator reveals God's self to humanity in special revelation is the providence of God in which God exercises God's government and judgment over God's creatures. Calvin first acknowledges providence in a few short sections in Chapter 5, sections 6-8, but it is evident by the place where he significantly discusses providence (chapters 16-18) that it belongs after the discussion on scripture and therefore under special revelation.⁷¹ A short section here, containing an exegesis of the different areas

where providence is discussed, is needed.

By putting down the strong and raising the weak and by sometimes allowing evil to come to the godly and not sinners, God shows God's power over the world and God's providential care.

Thus he clearly shows himself the protector and vindicator of innocence, while he prospers the life of good men with his blessing, relieves their need, soothes and mitigates their pain, and alleviates their calamities; and in all these things he provides for their salvation. And indeed the unfailing rule of his righteousness ought not to be obscured by the fact that he frequently allows the wicked and malefactors to exult unpunished for some time, while he permits the upright and deserving to be tossed about by many adversities, and even to be oppressed by the malice and iniquity of the impious.⁷²

In all the ways in which human life is governed, God's power is evident and all-inclusive. Even Paul and Barnabas

assume this principle that in the order of nature there is a certain and clear manifestation of God. Because the earth is watered by rain, because the heat of the sun quickens its growth, because fruits in such great abundance are produced year by year, we may surely gather from these things that there is some God who governs all things. For the heaven and the earth are not moved by their own power, much less even by chance. Therefore the conclusion is that this amazing ingenuity of nature plainly points to the providence of God, and that those who have said that the world is eternal have not spoken according to the understanding of their minds, but have tried through spiteful and barbarous ingratitude to obliterate the glory of God, and in doing so have betrayed their own impudence.⁷³

In summary,

In no greater degree is his power or his wisdom hidden in darkness. His power shows itself clearly when the ferocity of the impious, in everyone's opinion unconquerable, is overcome in a moment, their arrogance vanquished, their strongest defenses destroyed, their javelins and armor shattered, their strength broken, their machinations overturned, and themselves fallen of their own weight; and when their audacity, which exalted them above heaven, lays them low even to the center of the earth; when, conversely the humble are raised up from the dust, and the needy are lifted up from the dung heap; the oppressed and afflicted are rescued from their extreme tribulation; the despairing are restored to good hope; the unarmed, few and weak, snatch

victory from the armed, many and strong. Indeed, his wisdom manifests his excellence when he dispenses everything at the best opportunity; when he confounds all wisdom of the world; when 'he catches the crafty in their own craftiness'. In short, there is nothing that he does not temper in the best way.⁷⁴

In Chapter 2, the doctrine of providence will be looked into in greater depth to see further what Calvin means. At this point, however, it is important to notice that providence is as much a part of the special revelation of the knowledge of God the Creator as is creation.

Moreover, to make God a momentary Creator, who once for all finished his work, would be cold and barren, and we must differ from profane men especially in that we see the presence of divine power shining as much in the continuing state of the universe as in its inception. For even though the minds of the impious too are compelled by merely looking upon earth and heaven to rise up to the Creator, yet faith has its own peculiar way of assigning the whole credit for Creation to God. ...For unless we pass on to his providence -- however we may seem both to comprehend with the mind and to confess with the tongue -- we do not yet properly grasp what it means to say: 'God is Creator.'⁷⁵

Calvin explains that it is scripture which gives the appropriate understanding.

Thus David, having briefly stated that the universe was created by God, immediately descends to the uninterrupted course of His providence, 'By the word of Jehovah the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth' [Ps. 33:6]. Soon thereafter he adds, 'Jehovah has looked down upon the sons of men' [Ps. 33:13], and what follows is in the same vein. For although all men do not reason so clearly, yet, because it would not be believable that human affairs are cared for by God unless he were the Maker of the universe, and nobody seriously believes the universe was made by God without being persuaded that he takes care of his works, David not inappropriately leads us in the best order from the one to the other.⁷⁶

The doctrine of providence is a part of the special revelation within the doctrine of the knowledge of God the Creator. We have seen that knowledge of God the Creator in general revelation, in the *sensus*

divinitatis and the natural world, are both present and render humanity inexcusable before God. The revelation of God the Creator is present in general revelation but humanity can hardly see it. The special revelation within scripture is needed in order to truly know God.

According to Barth, Calvin can allow the Bible to talk about the Trinity, creation and providence without talking about Christ. It tells us of the Trinity, creation and providence by looking at the knowledge of God the Creator through scripture.

Calvin begins the *Institutes* with a whole book concerning God the Creator, which does not utilize God the Redeemer. To be sure, it has been said that while God, in principle, can be seen in humanity, the cosmos and history, and indeed through the *sensus divinitatis* and general revelation, humanity stands in a relationship of guilt and sin with respect to these.⁷⁷ Thus humanity cannot have a knowledge of God without the special revelation of scripture to correct sinful human knowledge. The special revelation of scripture, not knowledge of God in Christ, is what is necessary for knowledge of God the Creator.

By no means does this say that Calvin was not christological. Nothing could be further from the truth. No understanding of Calvin's theology could be discussed without acknowledging Calvin's declaration of Christ and our knowledge of God through Christ in the introduction to his *Commentary on Genesis*. It is truly a priceless example of Calvin's love for God and his dedication to understanding God and God's works through Christ. Because of its importance and beauty, it is necessary to quote a large section of this Introduction.

Now, in describing the world as a mirror in which we ought to behold God, I would not be understood to assert, either

that our eyes are sufficiently clear-sighted to discern what the fabric of heaven and earth represents, or that the knowledge to be hence attained is sufficient for salvation. And whereas the Lord invites us to himself by the means of created things, with no other effect than that of thereby rendering us inexcusable, he has added (as was necessary) a new remedy, or at least by a new aid, he has assisted the ignorance of our mind. For by the Scripture as our guide and teacher, he not only makes those things plain which would otherwise escape our notice, but almost compels us to behold them; as if he had assisted our dull sight with spectacles. On this point, (as we have already observed,) Moses insists. For if the mute instruction of the heaven and the earth were sufficient, the teaching of Moses would have been superfluous. This herald therefore approaches, who excites our attention, in order that we may perceive ourselves to be placed in this scene, for the purpose of beholding the glory of God; not indeed to observe them as mere witnesses, but to enjoy all the riches which are here exhibited, as the Lord has ordained and subjected them to our use. And he not only declares generally that God is the architect of the world, but through the whole chain of the history he shows how admirable is His power, His wisdom, His goodness, and especially His tender solicitude for the human race. Besides, since the eternal Word of God is the lively and express image of Himself, he recalls us to this point. And thus, the assertion of the Apostle is verified, that through no other means than faith can it be understood that the worlds were made by the word of God, (Heb. xi.3.) For faith properly proceeds from this, that we being taught by the ministry of Moses, do not now wander in foolish and trifling speculations, but contemplate the true and only God in his genuine image.

It may, however, be objected, that this seems at variance with what Paul declares: "After that, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom knew not God, it seemed right to God, through the foolishness of preaching, to save them who believe." (1 Cor. i. 21) For he thus intimates, that God is sought in vain under the guidance of visible things; and that nothing remains for us but to betake ourselves immediately to Christ; and that we must not therefore commence with the elements of this world, but with the Gospel, which sets Christ alone before us with his cross, and holds us to this one point. I answer, It is in vain for any to reason as philosophers on the workmanship of the world, except those who, having been first humbled by the preaching of the Gospel, have learned to submit the whole of their intellectual wisdom (as Paul expressed it) to the foolishness of the cross, (1 Cor. i. 21.) Nothing shall we find, I say, above or below, which can raise us up to God, until Christ shall have instructed us in his own school. Yet this cannot be done, unless we, having emerged out of the lowest depths, are borne up above all heavens, in the chariot of his cross, that there by faith we may

apprehend those things which the eye has never seen, the ear never heard, and which far surpass our hearts and minds. For the earth, with its supply of fruits for our daily nourishment, is not there set before us; but Christ offers himself to us into life eternal. Nor does heaven, by the shining of the sun and stars, enlighten our bodily eyes, but the same Christ, the Light of the World and the Sun of Righteousness, shines into our souls; neither does the air stretch out its empty space for us to breathe in, but the Spirit of God himself quickens us and causes us to live. There, in short, the invisible kingdom of Christ fills all things, and his spiritual grace is diffused through all. Yet this does not prevent us from applying our senses to the consideration of heaven and earth, that we may thence seek confirmation in the true knowledge of God. For Christ is that image in which God presents to our view, not only his heart, but also his hands and his feet. I give the name of his *heart* to that secret love with which he embraces us in Christ: by his *hands* and *feet* I understand those works of his which are displayed before our eyes. As soon as ever we depart from Christ, there is nothing, be it ever so gross or insignificant in itself, respecting which we are not necessarily deceived.⁷⁶

Clearly, Calvin wanted to look to God by way of Jesus Christ. He expressly declares that Christ is the heart of God. He could hardly have been more Christological.

From a 20th century perspective, however, it is sad that Calvin did not explicitly begin his discussion of creation with Christology. With his express view that Christ was the heart of God, why did he not carry that out in the structure of the *Institutes*? According to the *Institutes* there is knowledge of God the Creator within scripture, apart from Jesus Christ. While Calvin indeed argues that Jesus Christ is the Mediator between God and humanity, he expressly wants to delineate, in Book I, all the ways in which God is in fact known in the world, and this without Christ.

But the question remains: Why did he not begin his *Institutes* with the one revelation of God where God is incarnate on earth, where we find, not simply a better knowledge of God but our only knowledge

of God? There is no disputing the fact that Calvin was Christological. It is only regretted that in his *Institutes* he was not Christological enough, that he did not begin with the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.⁷⁹

As we shall see throughout our explication of Calvin's doctrines of God and providence, the division of the knowledge of God into knowledge of God the Creator and knowledge of God the Redeemer, and the division of general and special revelation, do not serve Calvin's overall theology. Calvin is nothing if not a biblical theologian. But he failed to see that in structuring his *Institutes* by building up his doctrine of God the Creator apart from God the Redeemer, he went against his own christocentric, biblical understanding of the Christian faith.

There are several elements to Calvin's theology in general and the doctrine of the knowledge of God in particular which have been encountered, and which therefore need to be elucidated further. Specifically, these are 1) to what extent Calvin used his earlier humanist and philosophical education in his explanation of the Christian faith, and 2) the accommodating character of the revelation of God to humanity.

C. Philosophy

An understanding of Calvin's relationship with philosophy cannot occur without the background knowledge of his life and times.

Calvin was born in 1509 and moved to Paris in 1523 to continue his education. It was an era of burgeoning interest in the classics and all that pertained to the ancients and ancient literature. A

young man coming into his own would have been confronted with the renaissance of Greek ideas and world-views, and Calvin himself was not left out, indeed, his first major work dealt with Seneca and Stoicism.

Calvin had a curious relationship with humanism throughout his life,⁸⁰ and it by no means diminished when he began to explicate his understanding of the Christian scriptures. He published his *Commentary on Seneca's de Clementia*⁸¹ in April, 1532, at 22 his first major work, and this study and fascination with Stoicism, and indeed much of classical philosophy, made its influence felt throughout his life.⁸²

It is fascinating that he began with Stoicism and the classics, for these were coming into their own once again. The ancient authors had begun to be re-translated beginning in the late eleventh century, and preceding it was a resurgence of the ancient Greek. Plato and Aristotle came to the fore, and Aristotle became the primary text in medicine and philosophy.⁸³ Translations and re-translations were being made of the ancient Greek authors and as a result, there grew up a secular culture which had not been there heretofore. Renaissance humanism is the label under which this is now placed, mainly because of the rise of the ancient languages (Greek and Arabic) which allowed for the reading of many more kinds of literature than was possible before.

With the availability of books and better translations, a scholarship arose which was indeed quite new. Although it can be said that scholarship never stopped during the Middle Ages, it is also true that the scholasticism of that period was far more limited than what came later. Every aspect of learning was changed; for example, even

the reading of Aristotle changed the understanding of jurisprudence. What happened, quite simply, was the resurgence of a secular culture, e.g., reading the ancient philosophers, using original languages and sources, and thinking about this world at least as much as the next, with all the learning which that brought with it.³⁴

By the 16th century, the renaissance of classical authors and literature was in full swing, and along with it came a rebirth of the importance of the human being, a renaissance of life, and a new excitement about this world. The Church was in the process of loosing its grip on the world, for the winds of change, blowing across Europe, could not be stopped. Scholars were resurrecting the classical writers and reading them in their original languages, which meant that a reading of the holy scriptures in Greek and Hebrew was not far behind, no matter how stridently the church tried to block it. These scholars had no intention of a complete break with the established church. That probably never occurred to them. Their ambition was to enlarge their knowledge through diligent study, to learn because learning itself developed the human mind and person and thus was important, and this could only later lead to a break with the institution which sought to block any new thoughts and ideas.

Calvin was among those who saw in that literature something far more vital than what he had been studying in the name of the Church. He was a man of his time. It is true that his father was the impetus to study law rather than theology, but according to Ganoczy, it was the influence of his relative, Pierre Robert (Olivetanus),³⁵ and his teachers and friends that set him in a humanist direction.

After his father decided that John should no longer study

theology, he sent him to Orléans in 1528 and later Bourges to read law, and in both cities Calvin studied with some of the greatest jurists of the day. It was while he was reading law that Calvin began to be influenced by humanism more than ever before, and this marked an important juncture in his life.⁸⁶ He was greatly affected by the people who were studying during one of the turning points of history.

It was not, however, until Calvin returned to Paris 1531 that he began his own humanist studies in earnest. There he voraciously read the classical authors in their original languages, while also learning Greek and Hebrew. He became a committed humanist. He sought to read the classical writers in their original languages and come to his own conclusions. With regard to this and its results, his *Commentary on Seneca's de Clementia*, Ganoczy says:

He studied Greek and Hebrew, and above all he broadened his classical readings, which he no doubt had already begun in Bourges and Orléans. He read or reread as well Augustine's *City of God*. Then in April of 1532, ... the ever-wakeful young jurist was already selling the firstfruits of his literary powers. An impressive number of authors are quoted: Seneca, Homer, Ovid, Pliny, Cicero, Plutarch, Virgil, Juvenal, Horace, Lucian, Terence, and still others, including Augustine, Gregory the Great, and Erasmus. There are [also] learned etymologies of Greek words, along with explanations of Latin expressions.⁸⁷

And, as Williston Walker says of the *Commentary*, it "reveals on every page unwearied zeal in the mastery of the Greek and Latin classics."⁸⁸

This is the scholarly world in which John Calvin lived. By the time he was 22 he had read and written on some of the greatest works of history. This had a profound affect on his life and thinking. From then on everything he read would be subjected to the same critical thinking and criticism which he had given to Seneca. There was no way he could read without this base, this classical, scholarly

base, influencing him.⁸⁹

Even as he wrote on scripture, he could not get away from the classical definitions and understandings which he had learned so early, and thus there was a continuity of content as well as method. The fact that his first major work was on Seneca, a Stoic, made a great impact on the rest of his thought, and, although he would later reject Stoicism as the basis for life and pantheism on the grounds that it was not Christian,⁹⁰ the thesis that will be maintained here is that Calvin's study of Stoicism provided a kind of soil which would incline him to prefer or have an interest in certain biblical themes to the exclusion of other themes which might have moderated the overall shape of his doctrine of providence.⁹¹

When discussing the similarities and differences between Calvin and the Stoics, and because Calvin's doctrine of the knowledge of God has already been observed, it would be helpful to look at the Stoic doctrine of God in greater depth. It is this groundwork which will flesh-out their doctrine of providence later on.

THE STOIC UNDERSTANDING OF GOD

Stoicism was a philosophy which, in its more defined form, lasted roughly five hundred years, from Zeno, Cleanthes and Chrysippus in the third century B.C. to Seneca, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius in the second century A.D. Certainly, elements of their philosophy have played a part in philosophy throughout history, but it was those five centuries during which Stoicism flowered.

Stoicism was a philosophy and way of life which proclaimed an ordered world. Its gods were sane and rational, and its earthly life was founded upon reason and order. Nothing was out of place. It

contrasted sharply with Epicureanism, the philosophy which allowed for great flexibility and change in the world. Everything happened by chance or fortune; they simply "came off." "Risk", "adventure" and "pleasure" were part of the Epicurean lifestyle, while most likely not even in a Stoic's vocabulary.³²

In general, the Stoics wanted to bring order to both the life of the individual and to society in much the same way as the heavens and cosmos appeared to be ordered. As a result, some of the Stoics worked mainly on the individual and inner order, while others dealt with the life of the society and how each person should be related within it. It must be emphasized that there were disagreements within the Stoic "school", and that there was no monolithic system of ideas. It can be said, however, that all Stoics were united in their commitment to the law of nature and how it worked itself out in humanity and the universe.

The Stoic doctrine of God itself was related to that order. They did not hold to God as God is understood in the Judeo-Christian world. The nature of the word "god" can be seen from the variety of synonyms: God, Zeus, creative fire, ether, the word (logos), Reason of the world, Soul, law of nature or Universal law, providence, destiny, and order.³³

[T]he terms, Soul of the World, Reason of the world, Nature, Universal Law, Providence, Destiny - all mean the same thing, the one primary force penetrating the whole world. Even the more abstract expressions, Law, Providence, Destiny, have with the Stoics an essentially gross meaning, implying not only the form according to which the world is arranged and governed, but also the essential substance of the world, as a power above everything particular and individual.³⁴

As Seneca said:

For what else is Nature but God and the Divine Reason that pervades the whole universe and all its parts? You may, as often as you like, address this being who is the author of this world of ours by different names; it will be right for you to call him Jupiter Best and Greatest, and the Thunderer and the Stayer,....If likewise you should call him Fate, it would be no falsehood; for, since Fate is nothing but a connected chain of causes, he is the first of all the causes on which the others depend...If, having received a gift from Seneca, you were to say that you were indebted to Annaeus or to Lucius,⁹⁵ you would be changing, not your creditor, but his name, for, whether you designate him by his first, his second, or his third name, he would nevertheless be the same person. So, if you like, speak of Nature, Fate, Fortune, but all these are names of the same God....⁹⁶

The Stoic doctrine of god might be described as "immanentistic pantheism" or "naturalistic monotheism", both of which point to a divine essence within all things. As Aetius said:

(1) The Stoics made god out to be intelligent, a designing fire which methodically proceeds towards creation of the world, and encompasses all the seminal principles according to which everything comes about according to fate, (2) and a breath pervading the whole world, which takes on different names owing to the alterations of the matter through which it passes.⁹⁷

And, as Diogenes Laertius said, "God is one and the same with Reason, Fate, and Zeus; he is also called by many other names."⁹⁸ Partee says that "according to the Stoics, God is the pre-eminent Being who is identified with the λόγος σπερματικός, the generative reason or cause of the world."⁹⁹ Elsewhere we find much the same, that "the Stoics defined God as a 'rational spirit having itself no shape but making itself into all things.'"¹⁰⁰

This doctrine of God is pantheistic. It holds to a divine essence immanent in all things and equates this divine essence with world order or reason, and is also called providence. Thus, providence is simply no different. As we have seen, Providence, too,

is the world order or reason, the λόγος σπερματικός, the natural law. It is still "the one primary force penetrating the whole world."¹⁰¹

A related aspect of the Stoic doctrine of God, according to Zeller, is that

...there is no difference between God and primary Matter. Both are one and the same substance, which, when regarded as the universal substratum, is known as undetermined matter; but when conceived of as acting force, is called all-pervading Ether, all-warming Fire, all-penetrating Air, Nature, Soul of the world, Reason of the world, Providence, Destiny, God....According to the Stoic teaching, every particular element has in process of time developed out of primary fire or God, and to God it will return at the end of every period of the world....From what has been said it follows that the Stoics admitted no essential difference between God and world. Their system was therefore strictly pantheistic. The world is the sum of all real existence, and all real existence is originally contained in deity, which is at once the matter of everything and the creative force which moulds this matter into particular individual substances.¹⁰²

That, we will see in due course, is an essential difference between Stoicism and Calvin. God, according to Calvin, and indeed for Christianity as a whole, can never be confused with nature. God always stands above nature, guiding and perfecting it, but is never one with it. God is something totally other.¹⁰³ We will take this up further later on.

The fruit of Calvin's humanist education and study of law during this resurgence of the ancient philosophers was his *Commentary on Seneca's de Clementia*. While living in the midst of change and the new excitement about the world, certainly a new commentary, possibly adding to Erasmus' own two books on the *de Clementia*, was the way towards proving himself in the new era.¹⁰⁴ He arrived in Paris in June, 1531, having recently buried his father. There he began his humanist studies in great earnest, and, as seen from Ganoczy's



analysis earlier, we know that he steeped himself thoroughly in the humanist authors and their works. In an extremely short amount of time he became something of an authority on the classical Greek writings, and he specifically chose to write a commentary on Seneca's *de Clementia*. We will look closer at this in the next chapter. We will also be interested to see if, despite his best instincts, Calvin retained much of the Stoic determinism that he so ardently denounced. If he did retain it, it will be despite his admirable attempts to prove the contrary.

D. Accommodation

Calvin believed that God was accommodating God's self to human capacity. This he presents quite clearly in I.13.1.:

For who even of slight intelligence does not understand that, as nurses commonly do with infants, God is wont in a measure to 'lisp' in speaking to us? Thus such forms of speaking do not so much express clearly what God is like as accommodate the knowledge of him to our slight capacity. To do this he must descend far beneath his loftiness.¹⁰⁵

Calvin believed that God could not present God's self to humanity directly, and thus accommodated God's self to human eyes and ears. Dowey is certainly correct in understanding this accommodation in two different aspects, the accommodation of God to finite understanding which is a part of creation, and God's accommodation to human sinfulness in the works of redemption.¹⁰⁵ In one sense this has to do with God accommodating God's self to humanity because humanity cannot know God's essence. It is an accommodation of the Infinite to the finite. Calvin is certainly no speculative theologian. He is not concerned with penetrating to the essence of God, since for him it is

largely unknowable.¹⁰⁷

God accommodating God's self in creation concerns the fact that without this, humanity could have no knowledge of God at all. In the works of creation God shows God's self in its brightness, and in the creation of the world in six days, God shows God's self to be a kind and loving Father. In all of that, God is accommodating God's self to the human mind.

As if in the vast circle of heaven and earth enough things do not present themselves to engross all our senses with their incomprehensible brightness. ... With the same intent Moses relates that God's work was completed not in a moment but in six days. ... For even though our eyes, in whatever direction they may turn, are compelled to gaze upon God's works, yet we see how changeable is our attention, and how swiftly are dissipated any godly thoughts that may touch us. ... But we ought in the very order of things diligently to contemplate God's fatherly love toward mankind, in that he did not create Adam until he had lavished upon the universe all manner of good things.¹⁰⁸

This is reiterated in his commentary on Genesis, in that God "took the space of six days for the purpose of accommodating his works to the capacity of men."¹⁰⁹

This occurs also in Calvin's chapter on creation, I.14. Beginning his discussion on angels, Calvin remarks that Moses did not speak about them because he was speaking to common folk.

To be sure, Moses, accommodating himself to the rudeness of the common folk, mentions in the history of the Creation no other works of God than those which show themselves to our own eyes. Yet afterward when he introduces angels as ministers of God, one may easily infer that he, to whom they devote their effort and functions, is their Creator. Although Moses, speaking after the manner of the common people, did not in laying down basic principles immediately reckon the angels among God's creatures, yet nothing prevents us from conveying plainly and explicitly what Scripture elsewhere repeatedly teaches concerning them.¹¹⁰

He gives evidence of this again when speaking of angels, in

asking why God uses them at all. Why would God need such creatures?

Simply because of human weakness.

Yet we shall well avoid this peril if we inquire why it is through them [angels] rather than through himself without their service that God is wont to declare his power, to provide for the safety of believers, and to communicate the gifts of his beneficence to them. Surely he does not do this out of necessity as if he could not do without them, for as often as he pleases, he disregards them and carries out his work through his will alone, so far are they from being to him a means of lightening difficulty. Therefore he makes use of angels to comfort our weakness, that we may lack nothing at all that can raise up our minds to good hope, or confirm them in security. One thing, indeed, ought to be quite enough for us: that the Lord declares himself to be our protector. But when we see ourselves beset by so many perils, so many harmful things, so many kinds of enemies -- such is our softness and frailty -- we would sometimes be filled with trepidation or yield to despair if the Lord did not make us realize the presence of his grace according to our capacity.¹¹¹

There is not only an accommodation to human in creation but also to human sinfulness. This refers specifically to Christ.

For there are two distinct powers of the Son of God. The first appears in the architecture of the world and in the order of nature. By the second He renews and restores fallen nature. He is the eternal Word of God: and so by Him the world was made; by His power all things keep the life they once received; in particular, man was adorned with the unique gift of understanding, and though by his fall he lost the light of understanding, he still sees and understands, since what he naturally possesses from the grace of the Son of God is not entirely lost.¹¹²

This has also been clearly shown in the way that Calvin not only used accommodation to resolve the inconsistencies of scripture, but he also used it to point to a spiritual maturity "in the pilgrimage of Israel to Christ",¹¹³ using especially words like Father and Teacher.¹¹⁴ In discussing the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, Calvin claims that as a father, God raises God's children from birth to maturity, and in so doing gives them different

understandings of who God is. This does not mean that God changes, but simply that God's children see God differently as they grow older.

I reply that God ought not to be considered changeable merely because he accommodated diverse forms to different ages, as he knew would be expedient for each. If...a householder instructs, rules, and guides, his children one way in infancy, another way in youth, and still another in young manhood, we shall not on this account call him fickle and say that he abandons his purpose. Why, then, do we brand God with the mark of inconstancy because he has with apt and fitting marks distinguished a diversity of times? The latter comparison ought to satisfy us fully. Paul likens the Jews to children, Christians to young men. What was irregular about the fact that God confined them to rudimentary teaching commensurate with their age, but has trained us through a firmer and, so to speak, more manly discipline? Thus, God's constancy shines forth in the fact that he taught the same worship of his name that he enjoined from the beginning. In the fact that he has changed the outward form and manner, he does not show himself subject to change. Rather, he has accommodated himself to men's capacity, which is varied and changeable.¹¹⁵

While no Reformed Christian could say that we can, by our own efforts, know God's essence, the question must be asked whether, from Barth's perspective, in Calvin's use of accommodation, when God condescends and accommodates God's self to us, God is really revealing God's self?¹¹⁶ "It is the work, power, activity, or will of God rather than his being or essence that we know, and then only so far as it is directed toward us."¹¹⁷ In Calvin's idea of accommodation there occurs a breach between who God really is and who God reveals God's self to be, and we are left wondering which God is the real and true God. Even in the incarnation, Calvin perceived an aspect of Christ which we see, and another aspect which remains hidden and unknown. To John 14:10, "That I am in the Father, and the Father in me," Calvin states: "I do not refer these words to Christ's divine essence, but to the mode of the revelation. For Christ, so far as His secret

divinity is concerned, is not better known to us than is the Father."¹¹⁸ Again, a Barthian can claim that we are faced with a God we might know and a God we do not know. While Calvin was correct in so far as he knew humanity could not penetrate to the essence of God, he failed to see that his idea of accommodation divides God into who God really is and who God presents God's self to be. This, then, threatens whether knowledge of God is possible at all, and leads to corollary questions of a hidden God, or a hidden will behind the will which God chooses to reveal. If so, how can we trust the will revealed to us? We must state a difference between the concepts of God preserving the mystery of God while revealing God's true self and God revealing one will in accommodation to humanity while maintaining a secret, hidden will within God's essence, or "God hidden *in* his revelation and *behind* his revelation."¹¹⁹ It is true that there is a *deus absconditus*. What is at stake is whether the *deus relevatus* really reveals the *deus absconditus* or only a part of it. "The problem is not merely that there is a hidden will alongside of the revealed will of God, but that the two are found to be in apparent contradiction."¹²⁰ This question will assert itself again and again as we encounter Calvin's doctrine of providence, and as we progress will look at it in more detail.

Calvin's use of accommodation has also shown that regardless of what Calvin may have thought about a heliocentric versus a geocentric view of the universe, Calvin believed God accommodated God's self to humanity because God does not reveal who God is in God's self. "It is axiomatic for Calvin that God cannot be comprehended by the human mind. What is known of God is known by revelation; and God reveals

himself, *not as he is in himself*, but in forms adapted to man's capacity."¹²¹ It is this understanding of revelation which needs to be highlighted here. The question is not whether God reveals God's self. It is that when God does reveal God's self, do we have a revelation of God's self or a "form adopted to [human] capacity"? When God reveals God's self, are we being encountered by God, the real and true God, or only one form of God which God wants to show?

We have located several of the issues which arise within Calvin's doctrine of the knowledge of God. It is now important to look specifically at his doctrine of the providence of God and perhaps detect whether any of these same issues return.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER 1

¹Bouwsma, in "Calvin and the Renaissance Crisis of Knowing", maintains that leading up to and during the Renaissance there was a crisis of knowing, which entailed moving from the earlier understanding of knowledge = the thing known to an uncertainty about what we do know. There was a new understanding of the limitation of knowledge. Calvin would have struggled with this crisis. "John Calvin was acutely sensitive to the unsettling developments that I have summarized as the 'Renaissance crisis of knowing,' developments in which we can also sense what was most modern about Renaissance culture....I do not mean to suggest that Calvin dealt with the problems of Renaissance culture with total success. I have come to believe, indeed, that he was never able to make a final choice between the traditional and the Renaissance or modern conception of what it means to know something, and that he was torn between them in what must have been considerable agony." (pp. 200-1) (*Calvin Theological Journal*, 17, 2, 1982, pp. 190-211.) This crisis of knowing must be acknowledged at the outset. Calvin's book titles in his *Institutes* attest to his preoccupation with the problem of knowledge. To go into further philosophical analysis of epistemology, however, is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

²E.A. Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*, (Columbia Univ. Press, New York, 1952, p.41, italics added). Dowey's analysis remains the foremost exposition of this understanding of Calvin's doctrine of God. It will be used throughout this explication of Calvin's doctrine. Dowey makes the case that while Calvin wanted his *Institutes* to reflect the structure of the Apostles' Creed, nevertheless, it took on and reflected the *duplex cognitio domini*.

In the Preface to the Second Printing, however, Dowey says that the knowledge of God the Creator is dependent upon the knowledge of God the Redeemer (p. X). It is difficult to reconcile Dowey's two statements, for if the revelation of God as Creator sets the context and proposes the categories within which the revelation of God as Redeemer is to be grasped, one is hard pressed to attribute a "dependence" of the knowledge of God the Creator on the knowledge of God the Redeemer. One must certainly ask what Dowey means by dependency, but if knowledge of God the Creator sets the context and proposes the categories, it might be more realistic to say that the knowledge of God the Redeemer is "dependent" on knowledge of God the Creator. That is, the knowledge of God the Creator establishes the presuppositions and the parameters within which knowledge of God the Redeemer can be discussed. The knowledge of God the Creator defines the way in which knowledge of God the Redeemer can be examined. I believe that the first statement (found in the quotation) is truer to Calvin. The knowledge of God the Creator, as we shall see, sets the stage for and determines the arguments which the knowledge of God the Redeemer answers.

Charles Partee, in his article, "Calvin's Central Dogma Again", (*Sixteenth Century Journal*, 18.2., 1987, pp. 191-199) argues for a different approach to the division of the *Institutes*. Because the twofold knowledge of God deals with the theocentric elements of

Calvin's theology does not mean it handles the anthropocentric elements equally well. Partee believes that "union with Christ" is a better way of expressing Calvin's intentions. Using union with Christ as Calvin's central dogma, Partee divides the *Institutes* into "God for us" (Books I and II) and "God in us" (Books III and IV). He does not allow that Calvin would have had this exact structure in mind when writing, but that it behooves us to use it in understanding the *Institutes* as we now have them. While Partee makes a convincing argument about Calvin's whole theology, that Calvin believed God is indeed for us and in us, it does little to shed light on what Calvin expressly sought to accomplish in Book I, namely, the knowledge of God the Creator. To claim that Calvin believed God is for and in us is true. To claim that it "'fits' Calvin's discussion in a more comprehensive way than other suggestions" (p. 195) is to miss Calvin's arguments as they are presented.

³R. A. Muller says, "Although the phrase *duplex cognitio dei* is probably original to Calvin and was first used as a structural principle in the final edition of the *Institutes*, the basis of the concept was the Augustinian piety held in common by the theologians of reform. Earlier than 1559 Calvin stated the problem of a twofold knowledge of God as a corollary of his exegesis of the Gospel of John. A very clear statement of the *duplex cognitio dei* also occurs contemporaneously with the last editions of the *Institutes* in Pierre Viret's exposition of the Creed." ("*Duplex cognitio dei* in the Theology of Early Reformed Orthodoxy", *Sixteenth Century Journal*, X.2. 1979, p. 54.)

⁴I.2.1., Niesel remarks to this two-fold knowledge of God: "All that Calvin says about the natural knowledge of God is subject to the one condition: if Adam had not fallen. In that very passage of the *Institutes* where he speaks about the two-fold source of our knowledge of God he goes on immediately to add that the simple knowledge of God from nature would only be possible to us if Adam had not fallen." (*The Theology of Calvin*, Lutterworth Press, London, 1956, p. 44) While Niesel is indeed correct, he himself neglected what Calvin said after that. "Nevertheless, it is one thing to feel that God as our Maker supports us by his power, governs us by his providence, nourishes us by his goodness, and attends us with all sorts of blessings -- and another thing to embrace the grace of reconciliation offered to us in Christ." Then Calvin goes on to spell out his "First" and Second of this quotation. Niesel may be reading Calvin the way he wants to, not the way Calvin presents himself.

⁵I.2.1.

⁶I.6.1.

⁷I.6.1.

⁸I.14.20. Cf. also I.13.9, 11, 23, & 24. Any further pursual of this question should be pointed to Dowe's longer explication. For the purposes of this dissertation, the knowledge that this is the case is what is important.

⁹Dowey, *Op. cit.*, p. 43.

¹⁰Noble ("Our Knowledge of God according to John Calvin", *The Evangelical Quarterly*, 54, 1982, pp. 2-13), says that the *duplex cognitio dei* means a twofold knowledge of God as Creator and Redeemer, and does not mean "a twofold knowledge of God by general and special revelation. It is twofold in that it is knowledge of God in his twofold character towards us as Creator and Redeemer, not a twofold way of knowing." (p. 13) As soon as the distinction is made between the knowledge of God the Creator and knowledge of God the Redeemer, as soon as knowledge of God the Creator is dealt with apart from knowledge of God the Redeemer, a distinction in revelation is present. Dealing with knowledge of God the Creator without knowledge of God the Redeemer necessitates the distinction between general and special revelation. This happened to Calvin himself as we shall see.

¹¹Dowey makes the distinction between the subjective and objective characteristics of general revelation. Subjective refers to that which is within the human person, i.e., the *sensus divinitatis* and the conscience, and objective refers to the natural world or that which is outside of the person. While these are important distinctions, for the purposes here it will be necessary to elucidate only one of each to show Calvin's understanding of general revelation.

¹²Parker does a disservice to Calvin by treating the *sensus divinitatis* only in a rather cursory manner on pages 8 & 9, where he discusses it in passing when referring to the fact that Calvin does not begin his *Institutes* with the question of the existence of God as Thomas Aquinas began his *Summa Theologica*. Yet at the same time he also says, "The innate knowledge of God tells us as much (and as little, of course) as the demonstrations of the existence of God, for it is the knowledge -- hazy, imperfect, half-buried, yet still present -- that there is God." (p. 9, underline added.) It is this yet still present that is important for Calvin, and Parker does little to understand it. (*The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh, 1952.)

Parker also places this in the shadow of the 20th century debate as he tries to argue against Emil Brunner's understanding of Calvin's use of the word spectacles. (*Op. cit.*, pp. 29-32) He argues that Brunner wanted the spectacles to be used to correct not a lost but an impaired eyesight, which would leave humanity the ability to see something of the divine in God's works. This is, of course, the question of natural theology and will be taken up later in this chapter.

¹³Dowey, *Op. cit.*, p. 51.

¹⁴I. 3. 1.

¹⁵I. 3. 3.

¹⁶I. 3. 1.

¹⁷I. 3. 3.

¹⁹Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, trans. Francis Brooks, Methuen & Co., London, 1896, I.16-17.

¹⁹I.3.3.

²⁰Dowey, *Op. cit.*, p. 55.

²¹This is one place where Parker has systematically shown what Calvin did. (*Op. cit.*, pp. 31-2.)

²²I.4.1.

²³I.4.4.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵I.5.1.

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷Dowey, *Op. cit.*, p. 75, says that this is part of the "objective revelation in creation" (75). "From experience man is compelled (except that he sinfully resists) a posteriori to draw conclusions concerning the One who thus is known. This is neither the immediacy of the *sensus divinitatis* nor the a priori reasoning of such a thinker as Anselm. It is a combination of empirical observation and ratiocination." (75).

²⁸Comm. Ps. 19:1, Calvin Translation Society, 1843, Baker Book House reprint, 1989, Trans. Henry Beveridge. vol.4, p. 309.

²⁹I.5.1.

³⁰I.5.2.

³¹*De Natura Deorum*, II.LXI. p. 153.

³²I.5.2.

³³I.5.3.

³⁴The editor (*Institutes*) has noted that this is in agreement with Aristotle, (I.5.3. n9).

³⁵I.5.3.

³⁶Dowey, *Op. cit.*, p. 51.

³⁷I.5.5.

³⁸I.5.6.

³⁹Dowey, *Op. cit.*, p. 72f.

⁴⁰Cf. I. 5. 11-15.

⁴¹Dowey, *Op. cit.*, pp. 72-3. B. A. Gerrish says: "The natural awareness of God (the *sensus divinitatis*) serves, in practice, only to render man inexcusable, since he deliberately smothers it. Calvin denies that the inborn knowledge of God can ever be totally extinguished; it can be distorted (in the form of superstition and idolatry), or suppressed (by denial of God's providence if not of his existence), but never annihilated. He is caught, in fact, between two necessities: on the one hand, the light of nature must be bright enough to render man's ignorance culpable; and, on the other hand, it must not be so bright as to render unnecessary the light of the Word. The problem is solved by his understanding of human sinfulness: there is no defect in the revelation of God in the workmanship of creation, but it is nullified by man's perverseness. Therefore, although Calvin apparently has two sources of knowing God -- nature and Scripture -- only one is of immediate normative significance." (Gerrish, "The Word of God and the Words of Scripture", *The Old Protestantism and the New*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1982, pp. 58-9.)

⁴²Paul van Buren, *Christ in Our Place*, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh, 1957, pp. 3-4.

⁴³I. 5. 11-15 and II. 6-7.

⁴⁴I. 6. 1.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

⁴⁶I. 6. 6.

⁴⁷I. 6. 1.

⁴⁸I. 6. 2.

⁴⁹I. 10. 1.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹I. 10. 2.

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³*Ibid.*

⁵⁴I. 1. 2.

⁵⁵I. 10. 1.

⁵⁶I. 10. 2.

⁵⁷"Calvin had in his hand, as it were, the very instrument by which Luther had already freed himself of slavish adherence to the Bible and tortuous exegesis: the principle of 'Christ, the Lord of

Scripture' -- but he did not wield it. He developed...a lofty, psychologically subtle, and exclusively Christocentric doctrine of faith that could have come only from a living faith unencumbered by heteronomous formal authority, yet, as far as his theology in general was concerned, he never was willing to deny authority to a single casual expression in Scripture, except minor and theologically unaccounted for blunders of copyists and translators....But still he must be judged to have two not entirely reconcilable theological explanations of the faithful man's knowledge of God's special revelation. This flaw can be described, although he never used the terms, as a discrepancy between the so-called formal and material principles of the Reformation: the authority of Scripture and justification by faith in Christ." Dowey, *Op. cit.*, pp. 160-1.

⁵⁸I. 10. 2.

⁵⁹I. 13. 1-6.

⁶⁰Dowey, *Op. cit.*, p. 127.

⁶¹I. 13. 9.

⁶²Calvin goes on here to make this statement: "Despite this, because it ought to be agreed among all that Christ is that Word endowed with flesh, the testimonies affirming Christ's deity are suitably included here." Even though Calvin says this, I agree with Dowey that "[t]he doctrine does not include Calvin's Christology. Nor is it meant to establish the divinity of Christ, but rather of the Eternal Son or Wisdom of God who became incarnate in Christ and of the Spirit." (*Op. cit.*, p. 127) Calvin is not, at this point, trying to discuss christology. He is simply dealing with the second person of the Trinity, and he sees these as two different endeavors.

⁶³I. 13. 17.; Cf. I. 5. 6.

⁶⁴I. 13. 18.

⁶⁵E. D. Willis points out that Calvin's understanding and use of the Trinity grew throughout his life, that Calvin became more and more aware that non-biblical language helped to keep the doctrine from the heresies which came up, often by those who sought to use only biblical language to explain the Trinity. "Calvin never gave up his reservations about classical terminology. However -- and it is in this sense that one must speak about a development in Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity -- he became increasingly convinced of the immense usefulness of the accepted classical terminology for guarding against the heresies propagated by those who, under the program of restricting themselves to Biblical language, threatened the Biblical witness to the Triune God of which the classical language, for all its weaknesses, was a faithful interpreter." (*Calvin's Catholic Christology*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1966, p. 122.)

⁶⁶I. 14. 20.

⁶⁷I. 14. 21.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

⁶⁹I. 14. 22.

⁷⁰I. 14. 16.

⁷¹Gerrish says: "He introduces the Bible as a supplementary aid, in addition to God's disclosure of himself in mankind's innate awareness of him (chap. 3) and in the works of creation and providence (chap. 5)." *Op. cit.*, p. 58.

⁷²I. 5. 7.

⁷³Calvin, Acts 14:17, *The Acts of the Apostles 14-28*, Trans. J.W. Fraser, Eds. D.W. Torrance and T.F. Torrance, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh, 1966, p. 13.

⁷⁴I. 5. 8.

⁷⁵I. 16. 1.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*

⁷⁷Peter Brunner makes this case in his article, "Allgemeine und besondere Offenbarung in Calvins *Institutio*" (*Evangelische Theologie*, 1.1934/5).

⁷⁸J. Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses called Genesis*, vol. 1, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1989, pp. 62-64.

⁷⁹While other explanations of Calvin's theology have been written in the 20th century, namely T.H.L. Parker, W. Niesel and T.F. Torrance, they have looked at Calvin's theology with distinctly Barthian eyes.

Parker, after a chapter on the revelation in nature, uses Barth's argument from his *Nein!* response to Emil Brunner in 1934 to prove that although Calvin spent the first complete book of his *Institutes* discussing the revelation of God both in the natural world and scripture, he nevertheless went on to deny that it had any relevant worth at all, other than to render humanity inexcusable. (*The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh, 1952, pp. 27-40.)

Niesel, in a section entitled "The Question of Natural Theology", denies that Calvin had a natural revelation. He does this on the basis that although there are elements of God's glory in history and nature, and despite the fact that there is a *sensus divinitatis*, all has been lost in the fall of Adam. The fall negates any human ability to see what God has revealed in nature and in ourselves.

These revelations are nevertheless there, but solely to render humanity inexcusable. Humanity uses these "natural" revelations, but not to turn toward God.

He collapses Calvin's Book I distinction between what we learn

through scripture and what Christ teaches us, that is, Niesel does not see Calvin's distinction between revelation in scripture and revelation in Christ. Niesel did not come to grips with the fact that although Calvin in Book I can speak of the second person of the Trinity, Calvin is not speaking of Jesus Christ on earth. (*The Theology of Calvin*, Lutterworth Press, London, 1956 (1938), pp. 39-53.)

T.F. Torrance (*Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, Lutterworth Press, London, 1949) also speaks of Calvin's natural revelation. He reiterates that a seed of religion is within us and that nature does indeed reveal God. But he, too, reads Calvin as saying that these do not help us to come to God, only that they render us inexcusable before God. Yet he quotes Calvin (p. 160) as speaking of the knowledge of God which remains in us.

The question is not so much whether Calvin thought we could know God through these "natural" ways, but that Calvin spoke of them at all, and at the beginning of his *Institutes*.

Perhaps Niesel set the problem most clearly when he said, "The words 'if Adam had not fallen' are not only the all-inclusive condition governing Calvin's arguments: it would be better to say they are the minus sign preceding the whole sum of what Calvin teaches about man and his relation to God." (p. 46)

Dowey, however, answers this quite rightly by saying, "While it is true that a negative sign stands over the whole revelation in creation in Calvin's theology, we must not allow this sign to erase from our minds the magnitude of the sum thus negated. A negative sign is meaningless before a zero." (p. 72) We cannot allow Barth's understanding of the nature of revelation to influence our reading of Calvin, nor to colour our eyes as we try to understand the structure of Calvin's doctrine of the knowledge of God.

⁹⁰See, for example, biographies of Calvin such as A. Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, (The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1987), pp. 31-83, 127-131, 178-181; F. Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, (Collins, Longdon & New York, 1950), pp. 27-37; and W. Walker, *John Calvin: The Organiser of Reformed Protestantism, 1509-1564*, (G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York & London, 1906), pp. 1-69.

⁹¹*Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's de Clementia*, eds. F.L. Battles and A.M. Hugo, (E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1969).

⁹²Battles and Hugo remark about the influence of Cicero, Seneca and Erasmus on Calvin:

"If one glances at any of his [Calvin's] *Tractatus Minores*, or at the *Institutes*, and remarks there the beautiful Ciceronian periods set off by terse little Senecan sentences, and the wealth of patristic and scholastic Christian terminology varied with picturesque, often playful, idioms and metaphors and proverbs taken from classical mythology and history, then one need hardly ask in what school he had learnt this amazing art. It was the school of Erasmus." (*Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's de Clementia*, intro. by F.L. Battles and A.M. Hugo, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1969, p. 43*.)

Again: "Let us establish, first of all, that the term 'influenced' can bear many shades of meaning; and let us establish

further, that it would have been contrary to all experience if a zealous young student occupied himself for many months with Seneca, and eventually wrote a passionate defence of Seneca, and composed a lengthy commentary on Seneca, without being in the least touched, or charmed, or impressed -- in short, without being in the least influenced by anything Seneca had ever written." (pp. 46-7*)

³³P.O. Kristeller discusses the resurgence of Aristotle and Plato in his book, *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1979). Cf. p. 38.

³⁴Cf. Kristeller, *Ibid.*, pp. 106ff.

³⁵Genoczy, A., *Op. cit.* Genoczy mentions Olivetanus throughout. Cf. p. 61f.

³⁶This is not a speculation on any type of conversion experience. It is stating that the influence of his teachers and friends during his years of reading turned his mind towards renaissance humanism, where it was not so significantly inclined before. Genoczy says that "...the future reformer passed his entire youth...in a reformist atmosphere" (Genoczy, *Op. cit.*, p. 128), although it could not have been nearly so great an influence as his time at Orléans and Bourges.

"The very concept of Law, and the way in which the Roman jurists of old had worked it out, was to him a great and wonderful thing, as it was to remain to him always. It need hardly be pointed out that this legal training had a profound influence upon his later theological thinking, and that some of the most characteristic traits of reformed protestantism can be ultimately traced back to that same source." Battles and Hugo, *Op. cit.*, p. 15*.

"Calvin was never a theologian of the Scriptures alone. He was also a theologian of the church and a scholar whose humanist studies influenced his theology in the light of the best classical, patristic, and medieval nuances he deemed compatible with revelation." (*The Providence of God*, B.W. Farley, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1988, p. 12.)

³⁷Genoczy, *Op. cit.*, p. 75.

³⁸W. Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 96. Q. Breen, in his article "John Calvin and the Rhetorical Tradition" (*Church History*, 26.1., 1957), states that Calvin "moves in the Ciceronian tradition. But it is a dynamic Ciceronianism." (7) After a careful study of rhetorical traits in the *Institutes*, he comes to the conclusion that "There is a logic in the *Institutes*. In fact, it is full of logic. But the logic is not syllogistic. It is rhetorical logic. Syllogistic logic uses induction and the syllogism; rhetorical logic uses example and the enthymeme." (13)

J.C. McLelland makes the case, in his article "Calvin and Philosophy", (*Canadian Journal of Theology*, XI,1, 1965), that Calvin had quite a number of philosophical influences, e.g., French humanism, medieval scholasticism, "John Calvin stands in reaction to medieval scholasticism on behalf of Platonic humanism" (47), and human knowledge. None of these may be comprehensive, as "Calvin's is not a

'Christian philosophy' so much as a theology using philosophical data and method in critical fashion, that is partially." (48) He quotes Q. Breen on his 'dynamic Ciceronianism' and says:

I submit that it is somewhat along this line that we must look for a proper understanding of John Calvin, especially his attitude towards philosophy. He stands against philosophy as metaphysical speculation about ultimate reality, and against a systematic philosophy as preamble to faith....Therefore he accepts only a critical philosophy, moving within the idea of *epoche* of his beloved Plato, and of the Stoics. (52)

Brian Gerrish, ("The Reformation and the Rise of Modern Science: Luther, Calvin, and Copernicus", *The Old Protestantism and the New*, T. and T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1982, pp. 163-78), points out that it is unfounded to assert that Calvin was against Copernicus and his astronomical theories, not only because he probably did not know of them (p. 176) but because he principle of accommodation made unnecessary any conflict between "biblical and Copernican science." (p. 164)

We shall look more closely at his principle of accommodation later, but it is quite interesting to note that that principle "was used chiefly as a problem-solving device." (p. 177) It enabled Calvin to both keep his understanding of scripture and allow for developments in scientific research.

The question is whether or not this wedge driven between scripture and science, even though used only when there was a problem between the two, is not only true but still able to be used today. Surely this wedge, driven deeper and deeper between the two, can only serve to split the human self. When the human self looks out into the world it will be forced to give one answer to its questions by scientific research and another from scripture. We see the inevitable result of this wedge, e.g., in the constant fights between those who look to science to help them decipher how the world began and those who adhere to a literal understanding of the creation of the world in six days. Surely this wedge only serves to fracture an already fractured humanity. The answer must not be to be "scientific" for six days a week and "biblical" one. The answer is to drop the principle of accommodation and look with free eyes at both scripture and the modern world. Perhaps seeing both from the eyes of Christ will help us to reconcile and renew both science and theology, rather than splitting both them and ourselves.

89"Erasmus and Calvin in Basel signify the intersection of two eras. Calvin had learned much from the great scholar, not the least of which was how to study the Scriptures. Calvin did not cease to be a humanist after he became a reformer. But his conversion and his immersion in the biblical and patristic sources led him down a very different path than that taken by Erasmus. Calvin's path was much closer to, but still distinct from, Erasmus's old adversary in Wittenberg." (T. George, *Theology of the Reformers*, Broadman Press, Nashville, 1988, pp. 176-7.)

⁹⁰Cf. *Institutes* III.8.9. ff, where he rejects the Stoic idea of *apatheia*.

⁹¹In his article, "Calvin's Use of Cicero in the *Institutes* I:1-5 -- A Case Study in Theological Method", (*Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 62, 1971), E. Grislis makes this statement with regard to Calvin's use of Cicero:

Calvin's perspective is remarkably similar. Although at this point Calvin may proceed less formally and his arguments might appear mainly as a set of conclusions, still, he is presenting no mere summaries of biblical insights, but an outline of such observations that have been obtained through the use of man's natural capacities. (p. 13)

Bouwsma states: "...Calvin retained...a traditional respect for the philosophy which at other times he derided. This was, I think, not only a residue of traditional veneration for philosophy, but also a reflection of his own aristocratic culture, which combined particular respect for the work of the intellect with contempt for those who could not participate in it...." (W.J. Bouwsma, "Calvin and the Renaissance Crisis of Knowing", *Calvin Theological Journal*, 17, 2, 1982, p. 207.)

And Dakin stated: "There are passages in the *Institutes* which taken out of their context might almost seem to suggest that the Reformer was willing to confine men to Scripture entirely, as though nothing profitable could be found in any other place. But a consideration of his own educational system at Geneva alone is enough to refute such an idea." (A. Dakin, *Calvinism*, Duckworth, London, 1940, p. 191.)

After stating Calvin's philosophical sources for his Seneca Commentary, Battles and Hugo state: "From all these Calvin forged no clear system of his own, but began to form philosophical attitudes which were to flower, after his conversion, in his mature writings." (*Op. cit.*, p. 133*)

⁹²It is important to see that Stoicism not only had its own philosophy, but it stood over against Epicureanism and often defined itself that way. To see Stoicism clearly one must keep that in mind.

⁹³Zeller, E. *The Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics*, (Longmans, Green, & Co., London, 1880), pp. 148ff. These words meant basically the same thing.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 152-3.

⁹⁵Seneca's full name was Lucius Annaeus Seneca.

⁹⁶Seneca, *De Benefic*, iv.7.1.-iv.8.3. Seneca, *Moral Essays*, III. (Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1935), pp. 217, 219, 221.

⁹⁷As quoted in Long, A.A., & Sedley, D.N. *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. 1. (Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge, 1987), pp. 274-5.

⁹⁸*Diogenes Laertius II*, Loeb Classical Library, eds. E. Capps, T.E. Page & W.H.D. Rouse, (London & New York, 1925), p. 241.

⁹⁹Partee, C., *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought, vol. XVI, (E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1977), p. 43.

¹⁰⁰*Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol 8, The Macmillan Co. and The Free Press, New York, 1967, p. 21.

¹⁰¹Zeller, p. 152.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, pp. 155-7.

¹⁰³Zeller says that Boëthus disagreed with the Stoics at this point. He says, "Boëthus alone dissented from their pantheism by making a real distinction between God and the world." (*Op. cit.*, p. 159) God, for Boëthus, did not equal the world.

¹⁰⁴"...Calvin evidently felt that this publication would decide his future. This was his Rubicon! The *Commentary on Seneca* was not, to him, a mere excursion into the field of classical scholarship. It was a serious, purposeful undertaking; it was a calculated throw of the dice on which he was staking all his hopes of a future career. If the throw were successful, he could look forward to a future of fame and honor; if unsuccessful, he might as well give up all further efforts in this direction." André Malan Hugo, *Op. cit.*, Battles and Hugo, p. 30.

¹⁰⁵I. 13. 1.

¹⁰⁶Dowey, *Op. cit.*, pp. 3-17; cf. G.J. Postema, "Calvin's Alleged Rejection of Natural Theology", *SJT*, 24, 1971, pp. 428-9, "Although fallen man is blind to the glory of God in creation, through the 'spectacles' of Scripture man is again able to recognise God the Creator in his world. Having recognised the sorry plight of fallen man, God, in his grace and love, a second time 'accommodates' himself (his revelation in nature, of course, being his first 'accommodation'). This time it is through the words of men, which become the Word of God."

¹⁰⁷Willis confirms this especially with regard to Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity. "When it comes to this doctrine, he [Calvin] says, humble submission to Scripture more than theological acumen is called for to avoid, above all, audacious speculation about God's inner being. Unleashed Trinitarian speculation was always distasteful to Calvin, but his experience in controversy over the years demonstrated to him that in addition to being empty and signifying the haughtiness of man, anti-Trinitarian speculation brought heretical

tendencies jeopardizing the soteriological impact of the Biblical witness." Willis, *Op. cit.*, p. 123.

¹⁰⁶I. 14. 1, 2.

¹⁰⁹Comm. Gen. 1:5, Dowey, *Op. cit.*, p. 9, Cf. I. 14. 22.

¹¹⁰I. 14. 3.

¹¹¹I. 14. 11.

¹¹²Calvin, John 1:5, *The Gospel according to St. John, 1-10*, Trans. T.H.L. Parker, eds. D.W. Torrance and T.F. Torrance, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh, 1959, pp. 12-13.

¹¹³F.L. Battles, "God was Accommodating Himself to Human Capacity", *Interpretation*, 31, 1977, p. 27.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 19-38. Battles shows clearly that Calvin understood God to be accommodating God's self to human capacity, indeed, he calls this "divine rhetoric", through which "the infinitely greater gulf between God and man, through divine condescension, in word and deed, is bridged." (p. 20).

¹¹⁵II. 11. 13.

¹¹⁶Bouwsma believes that "accommodation" is Calvin's answer to the crisis of knowing before and during the Renaissance. Cf. note 1.

¹¹⁷Dowey, *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹¹⁸Calvin, John 14:10, *The Gospel according to St. John, 11-21 and the First Epistle of John*, Trans. T.H.L. Parker, eds. D.W. Torrance and T.F. Torrance, The St. Andrew Press, Edinburgh, 1961, p. 78.

¹¹⁹B.A. Gerrish, "'To the Unknown God', Luther and Calvin on the Hiddenness of God", *The Old Protestantism and the New*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1982, p. 133.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 137. Gerrish claims that for Luther "The problem is noetic, not ontic -- in our understanding, not in God's being...that there is a solution even if it lies beyond history....In the meantime, we have to admit the antithesis between God as revealed and preached, on the one hand, and God as hidden and unknown, on the other -- indeed, as Luther puts it still more sharply, between the Word of God and God himself." (p. 136.) This claim can be made for Calvin too.

¹²¹B.A. Gerrish, "The Reformation and Rise of Modern Science: Luther, Calvin, and Copernicus", *The Old Protestantism and the New*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1982, p. 175.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

In Chapter 1 we saw the context in which providence is placed in the 1559 *Institutes*. Calvin's structure in his doctrine of the knowledge of God was shown to be divided into the *duplex cognitio domini*, and, further, that the doctrine of the knowledge of God the Creator was divided into general and special revelation (the Word of God). The doctrine of providence is located within the special revelation of scripture within the doctrine of the knowledge of the Creator. "For unless we pass on to his providence...we do not yet properly grasp what it means to say: 'God is Creator.'"

We also saw other elements which bear on Calvin's theology as a whole, namely, his humanist and philosophical education and his use of the accommodating character of speech about God.

In chapter 2 we will look specifically at Calvin's doctrine of providence, placed in the context of the special revelation of scripture within the doctrine of the knowledge of God the Creator. The same categories will shed light on how Calvin builds up his doctrine of providence, namely, his understanding of the Word of God and the relationship between general and special providence, his use of philosophy, and the accommodating character of talk about God. Calvin makes use of all of these in his attempt to understand how God's providential care is shown to us.

First we turn to Calvin's understanding of the Word of God, for

as we saw in Chapter 1, although the Word of God refers to Jesus Christ, Calvin also uses it to refer to scripture. It is within this use of the Word of God that Calvin places providence.

A. Word of God

We saw in Chapter 1 that Calvin understood the Word of God to mean all of scripture. Through scripture we learn about the Trinity, creation and providence. Now within providence, Calvin distinguishes two aspects, general and special providence, on the basis of his understanding of God's providence for the world in general and for specific human beings.²

In the first four sections of I.16, Calvin defines and explains how general and special providence are related. General providence is the fact that God sustains the universe once it has been created, that the world is not left to drift in space. Special providence is the fact that God cares for individuals and their lives and orders these as God sees fit. General providence is a general maintaining of the world once it has been created. Special providence deals directly with individual human lives. Both are part of the doctrine of God.

Calvin maintains that the world moves only by the power of God. No matter how one looks at the world, whether through Christian or pagan eyes, general providence, the idea that God created and sustains the world without any reference to particular actions within the world, is everywhere evident.

Carnal sense, once confronted with the power of God in the very Creation, stops there, and at most weighs and contemplates only the wisdom, power, and goodness of the author in accomplishing such handiwork. (These matters are self-evident, and even force themselves upon the unwilling.) It contemplates, moreover, some general preserving and governing activity, from which the force of motion derives.

In short, carnal sense thinks there is an energy divinely bestowed from the beginning, sufficient to sustain all things.³

Carnal sense knows that God created the world, and knows it because it can see it. It can see the way the world looks, the way it works and keeps on working.

Manifold indeed is the nimbleness of the soul with which it surveys heaven and earth, joins past to future, retains in memory something heard long before, nay pictures to itself whatever it pleases. Manifold also is the skill with which it devises things incredible, and which is the mother of so many marvelous devises.⁴

Calvin, however, does not stop there. It is not enough simply to view God as the Creator of all things. "At the outset, then, let my readers grasp that providence means not that by which God idly observes from heaven what takes place on earth, but that by which, as keeper of the keys, he governs all events."⁵ God is not the one who starts the world going, like a watchmaker, and then sits back and lets it run of its own accord. God is involved with God's creation.

Not so crass is the error of those who attribute a governance to God, but of a confused and mixed sort, ...namely, one that by a general motion revolves and drives the system of the universe, with its several parts, but which does not specifically direct the action of individual creatures. Yet this error...is not tolerable; for by this providence which they call universal, they teach that nothing hinders all creatures from being contingently moved, or man from turning himself hither and thither by the free choice of his will. And they so apportion things between God and man that God by His power inspires in man a movement by which he can act in accordance with the nature implanted in him, but He regulates His own actions by the plan of His will. Briefly, they mean that the universe, men's affairs, and men themselves are governed by God's might but not by His determination.⁶

And thus,

...I propose to refute the opinion (which almost universally obtains) that concedes to God some kind of blind and ambiguous motion, while taking from him the chief thing: that he directs everything by his incomprehensible wisdom

and disposes it to his own end. And so in name only, not in fact, it makes God the Ruler of the universe because it deprives him of his control. What, I pray you, is it to have control but so to be in authority that you rule in a determined order those things over which you are placed?⁷

It is faith, the knowledge which arises from scripture as illumined by the Holy Spirit, which perceives differently.

[Faith ought to penetrate more deeply, namely, having found him Creator of all, forthwith to conclude he is also everlasting Governor and Preserver -- not only in that he drives the celestial frame as well as its several parts by a universal motion, but also in that he sustains, nourishes, and cares for, everything he has made, even to the least sparrow.⁸

I do not wholly repudiate what is said concerning universal providence, provided they in turn grant me that the universe is ruled by God, not only because he watches over the order of nature set by himself, but because he exercises especial care over each of his works.⁹

Calvin believed that God is in the midst of human life, guiding and directing all the events which occur in human life, punishing sinners and pursuing the upright. God is always present, and whenever events are not understood it is because for a time God allows the wicked to go unpunished and the godly to be tossed about by all sorts of misfortune.¹⁰

Thus, there is the initial understanding that God is the Creator of the world and all that is in it. God has designed all things and set everything in motion. Lest we believe, however, that that is the extent of God's activity, Calvin asserts the fact that God is the Governor and Preserver of all things, not just the Creator. God not only sets the world in motion and sustains things, but so governs the world that God wills every specific event. Indeed, even the wind, the sea, and all "natural" elements are governed and ruled by God.¹¹

...[L]et us adopt this resolution: that prosperity and adversity alike, rain, wind, sleet, hail, good weather,

abundance, famine, war, and peace are all works of God's hand....¹²

Although this is an overall explanation of general and special providence, in his treatise *Against the Libertines* Calvin points to three areas of providence. There is first a general or "universal providence"¹³ in which God guides everything according to the way in which he made it. The second is that God causes his creatures "to serve His goodness, righteousness, and judgment according to His present will to help His servants, to punish the wicked, and to test the patience of His faithful, or to chastise them in His fatherly kindness."¹⁴ This refers to the fact that God is the cause of everything that happens. "And if anyone is killed accidentally in the process, it is He who is the cause of his death, indeed, has willed it, to the end that we might realize that nothing happens by chance, but only in accordance with His counsel and judgment."¹⁵ This means that even the devil and evil people are used by God for God's good will. The third area of providence is that God governs the faithful by God's Holy Spirit.

Whether or not Calvin divided his doctrine this rigidly in the *Institutes* is not the most important question. He could easily have separated providence into care for the world generally, care for human beings, and care for the church without harming his more overall division within providence as general and special, and we can certainly acknowledge that he used the terms "general" and "special".¹⁶

Nevertheless, Calvin says that God also sustains all things in such a way that God cares for human beings in a special way. "But

because we know that the universe was established especially for the sake of mankind, we ought to look for this purpose in his governance also."¹⁷

Yet the Spirit declares not only that the produce of the earth is God's special gift but that 'men do not live by bread alone'; because it is not plenty itself that nourishes men, but God's secret blessing; just as conversely he threatens that he is going to 'take away the stay of bread'. And indeed, that earnest prayer for daily bread could be understood only in the sense that God furnishes us with food by his fatherly hand. For this reason, the prophet, to persuade believers that God in feeding them fulfills the office of the best of all fathers of families, states that he gives food to all flesh. Finally, when we hear on the one side, 'The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and his ears toward their prayers', but on the other, 'The eye of the Lord is upon the impious, to destroy their memory from the earth', let us know that all creatures above and below are ready to obey, that he may apply them to any use he pleases. From this we gather that his general providence not only flourishes among creatures so as to continue the order of nature, but is by his wonderful plan adapted to a definite and proper end.¹⁸

It is also possible that Calvin thought of a very special providence for those who were elected to eternal life.¹⁹ This will be discussed under the doctrine of predestination in Chapter Three.

It has been suggested that Calvin's main position was one of special providence, with general providence a subsidiary of it.²⁰ This is most likely true. While Calvin was certainly interested in the general running of the earth and all the various aspects of it, he was most interested in individual human lives and how God related to them. Although Calvin acknowledged the creation of the heavens and wonderfulness of God's wisdom,²¹ he repeatedly spoke of human life in specific terms, in such a way that the comfort of the believer was of paramount importance. Whether falling into the hands of thieves along the road or meeting with an untimely death, Calvin wanted believers to

be comforted by the fact that God had their whole life in God's hands. Nothing was outside of his care and concern.²² As he said, "Gratitude of mind for the favorable outcome of things, patience in adversity, and also incredible freedom from worry about the future all necessarily follow upon this knowledge."²³

We know about general and special providence from the Word of God, from scripture. Calvin shows us that we know of a hidden providence as well.

But if they do not admit that whatever happens in the universe is governed by God's incomprehensible plans, let them answer to what end Scripture says that his judgments are a deep abyss. For since Moses proclaims that the will of God is to be sought not far off in the clouds or in abysses, because it has been set forth familiarly in the law, it follows that he has another hidden will which may be compared to a deep abyss; concerning which Paul also says: "O depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and how inscrutable his ways! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?'" And it is, indeed, true that in the law and the gospel are comprehended mysteries which tower far above the reach of our senses. But since God illumines the minds of his own with the spirit of discernment for the understanding of these mysteries which he has deigned to reveal by his Word, now no abyss is here; rather, a way in which we ought to walk in safety, and a lamp to guide our feet, the light of life, and the school of sure and clear truth. Yet his wonderful method of governing the universe is rightly called an abyss, because while it is hidden from us, we ought reverently to adore it.

Moses has beautifully expressed both ideas in a few words: "The secret things," he says, "belong to the Lord our God, but what is here written, to you and your children". For we see how he bids us not only direct our study to meditation upon the law, but to look up to God's secret providence with awe.²⁴

Therefore, since God assumes to himself the right (unknown to us) to rule the universe, let our law of soberness and moderation be to assent to his supreme authority, that his will may be for us the sole rule of righteousness, and the truly just cause of all things. Not, indeed, that absolute will of which the Sophists babble, by an impious and profane distinction separating his justice from his power -- but providence, that determinative principle of all things, from

which flows nothing but right, although the reasons have been hidden from us.²⁵

Now the choice of King Jeroboam shows clearly that what men do perversely is of God, and ruled by his hidden providence.²⁶

These quotations have been cited in their entirety because it is necessary to show that it was important for Calvin. From scripture Calvin deduced his doctrine of providence. But all was not self-evident to him and he recognized that many things are hidden from Christians. In the treatise *Against the Libertines* he says, "But the whole of the matter is that we ought not inquire into His providence, which is a secret to us...."²⁷

From his understanding of the Word of God as scripture he came upon a hidden providence and he was reluctant to penetrate it. It was to be looked upon with awe. He did not emphasize this aspect like he did others, such as fate, chance, and general and special providence. He did not want to speculate about this hidden providence. He simply wanted to acknowledge its presence.²⁸

A hidden providence, however, remains uncertain. We do not know what it is or who it is about. All we know is that it is hidden, unknowable. Can we trust this providence? Can we base our lives on a providence which remains hidden? From our perspective, although Calvin understood the Word of God to be specifically Jesus Christ, his doctrine of providence did not carry out that understanding. In building his doctrine of providence he did not carry through the real understanding of the Word of God, Jesus Christ. He resorted to a larger understanding of the Word of God to mean the totality of scripture and this diminished his doctrine of providence.

Thus, there remained a hidden providence behind whatever gracious understanding of God we have. Unless the Word of God is specifically Jesus Christ, we can never be sure about providence. There might be something lurking in the darkness behind our knowledge of God which could be against us. Unless the Word of God is Jesus Christ, God's secret providence is something which we can neither know nor trust.

This was not Calvin's intention. Calvin knew God to be trustworthy and faithful. He knew the doctrine of providence was a comforting doctrine. But he left himself open to this charge by allowing the Word of God to be larger than the specific man, Jesus Christ. By not making the Word of God equal with Jesus Christ, Calvin did not close the door to fear and anxiety, he did not close the door to a providence seen apart from the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He did not see that a hidden providence is excluded when we see providence through Jesus Christ.

Correspondingly, this question concerning the hidden providence brings to light the question of whether or not Calvin's doctrine of providence leans toward determinism, albeit a divine determinism, and whether or not, despite his very real attempt to discount it, his theology reflects two opposing wills in God. These questions will be highlighted as we continue.

We turn now to look at the fruit of Calvin's humanist education and study of law during the resurgence of the ancient philosophers, his *Commentary on Seneca's de Clementia*.

B. Philosophy

Lucius Annaeus Seneca was the teacher of Domitius (Nero) while he

was a boy, and continued to encourage and advise him once he became emperor. The *de Clementia*²⁹ is Seneca's letter to the Emperor Nero to promote clemency, or mercy, in a way that praises the emperor for the wisdom he has and places in front of him pictures which show the benevolent wisdom of fathers with their children. It is a teacher speaking to his pupil, albeit with the gentleness and deference of one who is speaking to one's emperor.

Seneca is concerned with pointing out the beneficial, humane and wise aspects of clemency; that is, since clemency is the wisest way to conduct oneself, especially as a ruler, he directs Nero's attention to all the reasons it is so. The "humane" and "wise" arguments are used most consistently, along with references to the "virtues". Seneca wanted to "maintain the mean", the "moderation" which was needed in order to differentiate between "curable and hopeless characters".³⁰ Because it is difficult to maintain this mean, he stressed that one "should tip the scales toward the more humane side."³¹

Seneca's treatise stresses that everything is done for the good of everyone. The ideal is to be considered the greatest and best:

But tell me: he who bears himself in a godlike manner, who is beneficent and generous and uses his power for the better end - does he not hold a place second only to the gods? It is well that this should be his aim, this his ideal: to be considered the greatest man, only if at the same time he may be considered the best.³²

Calvin quotes many of the ancients on the fact that they called all different kind of people "greatest" and "best", and Cicero explains it: "Jupiter our ancestors called 'best and greatest' because to benefit others is greater and more pleasing than to have the greatest power."³³ "To benefit others" is what Seneca means by clemency and

what he considers to be the most important of the virtues.

Calvin agrees with Seneca when he states that all people value clemency as a virtue. Calvin understands that clemency must be valued as a useful virtue. It cannot be commended to emperors and princes "by the mere contemplation of the good."³⁴ It must be shown that it is indeed useful and that it is good for society. "Either, then, we stand with the Stoics on the bare appeal to probity - clemency can please by its very name, for it is a name that binds together human society - or else we incline to pleasure or are drawn on by the hope of profit. Even here clemency keeps both its place and dignity."³⁵

There are very few direct references to providence by Seneca but "Fortune" he speaks of several times, and it is important to see them along with Calvin's response.³⁶

At the very beginning of his treatise on Clemency, Seneca gave to Nero the words that would be in Nero's mouth if he was a true and just emperor - an emperor who saw clemency as his most important virtue.

I of all mortals have found favor with Heaven and have been chosen to serve on earth as vicar of the gods. I am the arbiter of life and death for the nations; it rests in my hand what each man's fortune and state shall be; by my lips Fortune proclaims what gift she would bestow on each human being; from my utterance peoples and cities gather reasons for rejoicing; without my favor and grace no part of the wide world can prosper; all those many thousands of swords which my peace restrains will be drawn at my nod; what nations shall be utterly destroyed, which ones transported, which shall receive the gift of liberty, which have it taken from them, what kings shall become slaves and whose heads shall be crowned with royal honor, what cities shall fall and which shall rise -- this is my jurisdiction.³⁷

Calvin explains:

This statement...derives from the opinion of the Stoics, who attribute the superintendence of human affairs to the gods, assert providence, and leave nothing to mere chance. The Epicureans, although they do not deny the existence of the gods, do the closest thing to it: they imagine the gods to

be pleasure-loving, idle, not caring for mortals, lest anything detract from their pleasures; they deride Stoic providence as a prophesying old woman. They think everything happens by mere chance.³⁸

Calvin next quotes the ancient writers concerning how much care and concern for human beings, i.e., clemency, even they attribute to the gods:

But he who professes himself vicar of the gods, surely confesses that the gods look after human needs. For this reason, Homer [*Odyss.*, 7.49] calls kings *godnourished*, that is, fed by Jupiter; and in the *Iliad* [9.229] he writes that Agamemnon was made king by Jupiter. Pliny in his *Panegyric* [80.4] expresses it no less elegantly: *It is then, I would think, that the father of the world rules all with a nod of the head, when he has cast his glance upon the earth and deigned to count human deeds among the divine occupations. Now, freed of these cares by you, he occupies himself only with heaven, since he has appointed you to function as his vicar for the whole human race.* Truly indeed has someone spoken, as Plutarch says in his *Doctrine of Princes* [*Mob.*, 780D]: *Princes are God's ministers, for the welfare and care of men; as God bestows upon them, they distribute part; keep part.* With this agrees Numa Pompilius' utterance [Plut., *Life of N.P.*, 6.2]: *Rule is a ministry of the gods.* And in the same Plutarch [*Life of Themist.*, 27.3], one finds a similar saying by Artabanus: *Kings, likenesses of God who sustains all.* Quite rightly, then, Plato in his *Gorgias* makes God a sort of commander of the human race, assigning to each his station and military rank. Persius [*Sat.*, 3.71-72] has borrowed this idea from Plato:

What person God commanded you

To be; what rank he gave you in the human race.

Our religion, too, has such a confession: *Power comes from God alone, and those that exist have been ordained by God* [Rom. 13.1.].³⁹

Calvin does not contest Seneca's statement that the emperor is the "vicar of the gods." He does not go into any argument concerning the nature of the deity (whether God or gods) or whether or not a ruler is actually God's hand on earth. Calvin makes no argument either for or against. He simply explains the Stoic position as over against the Epicurean, and further, attempts to prove, from the ancients themselves, that their gods were indeed caring ones -- not

aloof and cold.

To some degree Calvin finds this explanation of God and God's hand on earth compatible with a Christian view. Aside from the question of the nature of the deity, the stress is on the fact that the ruler is God's vicar, i.e., rules on God's behalf, and that God indeed cares. As a Christian Calvin can affirm both. Indeed, he even quotes Scripture to emphasize its compatibility with Christianity.

From the statement, "our religion, too...." we know that Calvin was versed in scripture, and interested in the emphases on the emperor as God's personal ruler and that God is a benevolent God. All point to Calvin's Christianity. The question remains, however, why Calvin did not stress the difference between "God" in a Christian understanding and "the gods" from a Stoic or philosophical point of view. He does not discuss the apparent differences between himself and the Stoics concerning the nature of the deity.

Later, Calvin comments specifically on the phrase, "What each man's fortune", found in Seneca's first statement. "Here it is made clear that the prince is nothing but the instrument of Fortune, who by her hand and ministry turns everything topsyturvy. He uses 'fortune!' for 'God,' a term more common than proper. For there is nothing fortuitous for those who subject all things to necessity."⁴⁰ Clearly, Calvin understands the Stoics to be emphasizing the instrumental character of the emperor and the autocratic nature of Fortune (although, as Calvin says, "Fortune" is an unfortunate word). The stress here is on the absolute nature of necessity, which, as we have seen, could be god, nature, providence, etc. This necessity he could have called providence, yet by calling it "necessity" he emphasized

the Stoic as over against the Epicurean view that there is no "necessity" and everything happens by chance.

The Epicureans lived in a world in which they were totally free, because there was no meaning nor pattern in which to work out the terms of one's existence. They were like men at sea on a boat with no shore. The Stoics inhabited a world in which there was, if you will, too much meaning. Man could put no more into it. Everything was programmed and happened on schedule. They were like men in a boat tied at the shore. The Epicureans could go nowhere, as there was nowhere to go. The Stoics could go nowhere, because their craft was tied in a cosmological blueprint.⁴¹

Calvin returns to fortune by responding to Seneca's statement: "Magnanimity befits every human being, even him who is the lowliest of all. For what is greater or braver than to beat down misfortune?"⁴² Calvin responds:

Argument from similarities. A virtue equal and the same in two persons, shines and is more prominent in one than in the other. But before we explain this we must define magnanimity. Now, it is a virtue by which we learn to bear either kind of fortune with moderation: so that we are not elated by prosperity, our minds raised up; nor are we cast down and depressed by adversity and lose all courage. Therefore the limits of magnanimity are inflation of mind and elation -- the excess; dejection and faintheartedness -- the defect.⁴³

The emphasis has changed. Fortune itself is no longer the question; instead, magnanimity is discussed, magnanimity being the virtue which bears all things, good or ill, with moderation. What is important is that Calvin, too, believed in moderation. In fact, he says in the *Institutes*, "If anything adverse happens, straightway he [the servant of God] will raise up his heart here also unto God, whose hand can best impress patience and peaceful moderation of mind upon us."⁴⁴

What is also noteworthy in the *Commentary on Seneca* is that Calvin does not see a difference between bearing whatever Fortune

brings and what God brings. Calvin affirms the same virtues as the Stoics, yet makes no reference to a different presupposition, a different understanding of God.

With Seneca's remark, "A great soul befits a great position...",⁴⁵ Calvin explains that the great position is Fortune, and that the one who has the great position is the one who should have the great soul - the great soul being "peaceful and moderate".⁴⁶ Again, it is an argument for the moderation of the soul, for wisdom, understanding and clear thinking. It is an argument for the emperor not to get caught by emotions, but always to be clear headed and thoughtful, or as Calvin says later, "Nothing is great for the Stoics which is not also good and inwardly sound."⁴⁷

In the same chapter Seneca says: "To save life is the peculiar privilege of exalted station, which never has a right to greater admiration than when it has the good fortune to have the same power as the gods...."⁴⁸ Calvin's answer sounds like a philosopher.

Cruelty makes a king accursed of all men; indeed it makes a tyrant out of a prince. Clemency makes him lovable to all, superior to all, and finally like the gods. Of the gods is the fact that we are born, good and bad men alike; that we enjoy the common sky and air; that we are sustained by the same foods. Why shouldn't the prince imitate this gentle-dealing of the gods?⁴⁹

Although talking about "the gods", Calvin here sounds Christian, that is, if he simply would use the word "God" for "gods", it would be a paraphrase of the scriptural admonition that rain falls on the just and the unjust. He is arguing for the benevolence of the gods and the imitation of them by the emperor.

In Chapter VII, Seneca states: "Since I have made mention of the gods, I shall do very well to establish this as the standard after

which a prince should model himself - that he should wish so to be to his subjects, as he would wish the gods to be to himself."⁵⁰ Calvin remarks: "He [Seneca] reminds the prince of the natural law: that he treat his subjects as he would have the gods treat himself, for the gods rule him as he himself governs men. But if he lives and breathes by the tenderness of the gods, why shall man not rather be favorable to men and open to their entreaty?"⁵¹ Here is another mention of the gods, but with a phrase strongly related to the Biblical one. Both Seneca and Calvin use it as a statement confirming clemency, the virtues and the natural law. It is not being related to Christian God. It might be said that Calvin's use of the "natural law" here relates to his understanding of Christianity, but since he does not explicitly say so, it is merely a speculation.

Calvin, in the *Commentary*, does not state that Seneca's philosophy and Christian theology are similar. There are times when he mentions scripture (e.g., Romans 13),⁵² but he does not attempt to make a great point about the similarity between Seneca and Christianity.⁵³ None of his statements, taken alone, could indicate that he perceived a similarity between Stoicism and Christianity. Taken together, however, could not Calvin have glimpsed a parallel between Seneca's philosophy and a Christian doctrine of providence?⁵⁴ He affirms the notion that the emperor (or ruler) rules on God's behalf and that the gods indeed care about creation. Both of these are affirmed by Christianity, albeit with slightly different language, and one wonders whether Calvin believed the Stoic and the Christian understandings of these were, if not the same, extremely similar.⁵⁵

Calvin was beset by this seeming similarity between Christianity

and Stoicism throughout his life and he fought it at every turn. It came out most ardently in his refusal to let providence degenerate into chance or fate, and it is to this that we now turn.

1. CHANCE AND FATE

One of Calvin's major battles throughout his life was that he was fighting against philosophies which did not take the direct and sustaining intervention of God seriously. In particular, he was fighting the Epicureans on the one hand and the Stoics on the other. If the Epicureans believed that the world was ruled by chance and the Stoics that the world was ruled by fate, in either case, Calvin saw that God does not have an active, primary hand.

Velleius, speaking in Cicero's *de Natura Deorum*,⁵⁶ explains the Epicurean position most clearly. He states that the idea of the gods must be innate, and since their existence is universally admitted by philosophers and everyone else, one can be sure that this knowledge is preconceived. Add to this the fact that the gods are blessed and eternal, for, Velleius states, that is also innate. According to Epicurus, this necessarily meant that what is blessed and eternal knows no trouble and causes none to others, and is not affected by any emotion or whim. Anything that would be is weak. The most blessed and wonderful state to be in was one which did not worry about feelings and thoughts, but one which was untroubled by anything.⁵⁷ Epicureans make "blessedness of life depend upon an untroubled mind, and exemption from all duties...."⁵⁸ They see the world running by an order of nature which needs no help from a meddling deity and accuse the Stoics of resorting to a god when nature is what governs. The

Stoics attribute to this god so much that the god becomes a tyrant, and, Velleius says,

[y]ou have therefore placed our necks beneath the yoke of a perpetual tyrant, of whom we are to go in fear by day and night, for who would not fear a god who foresaw everything, considered everything, noted everything, and looked upon himself as concerned in everything, - a busy and prying god? From this has come, in the first place, your idea of preordained necessity, which you call *εὐμαρμένη*, meaning by the term that every event that occurs had its origin in eternal truth and the chain of causation...and secondly your art of *μαρτική*, or *divinatio*, as it is called in Latin, which, if we were willing to listen to you, would imbue us with such superstition that we should have to pay regard to soothsayers, augurs, diviners, prophets, and interpreters of dreams. From these terrors we have been released by Epicurus, and claimed for freedom; we do not fear beings of whom we understand that they neither create trouble for themselves, nor seek it for others, and we worship, in piety and holiness, a sublime and exalted nature.⁵⁹

This Epicurean understanding of God and the conterminous belief that chance governed all things Calvin could not have advocated, and indeed he says, "What good is it to profess with Epicurus some sort of God who has cast aside the care of the world only to amuse himself in idleness?",⁶⁰ and later, "I say nothing of the Epicureans (a pestilence that has always filled the world) who imagine that God is idle and indolent...."⁶¹ And, in his commentary on Psalm 33:13, he says "...that human affairs are not tossed hither and thither fortuitously, but that God secretly guides and directs all that we see taking place."⁶² Thus Calvin can say, here with regard to ungodly men and fools:

But to render their madness more detestable, David represents them as flatly denying God's existence; not that they deprive him of his being, but because, in despoiling him of his judgment and providence, they shut him up idle in heaven. Now there is nothing less in accord with God's nature than for him to cast off the government of the universe and abandon it to fortune, and to be blind to the wicked deeds of men....⁶³

By the same token, however, he also fought Stoicism because he thought their belief in fate destroyed God's active, primary hand and left everything to fate or an order of nature. As Cicero says when he speaks concerning the Stoic doctrine of Fate:

Now by Fate I mean the same that the Greeks call *ειμαρμένη*, that is, an orderly succession of causes wherein cause is linked to cause and each cause of itself produces an effect. That is an immortal truth having its source in all eternity. Therefore nothing has happened which was not bound to happen, and, likewise, nothing is going to happen which will not find in nature every efficient cause of its happening. Consequently, we know that Fate is that which is called, not ignorantly, but scientifically, 'the eternal cause of things, the wherefore of things past, of things present, and of things to come.'⁶⁴

Calvin, however, believed God's providence governs everything.

For...[God] is deemed omnipotent, not because he can indeed act, yet sometimes ceases and sits in idleness, or continues by a general impulse that order of nature which he previously appointed; but because, governing heaven and earth by his providence, he so regulates all things that nothing takes place without his deliberation.⁶⁵

In the *Institutes* and his commentaries, Calvin explicitly argued against the fate of the Stoics and the results it breeds:

We do not, with the Stoics, contrive a necessity out of the perpetual connection and intimately related series of causes, which is contained in nature; but we make God the ruler and governor of all things, who in accordance with his wisdom has from the farthest limit of eternity decreed what he was going to do, and now by his might carries out what he has decreed. From this we declare that not only heaven and earth and the inanimate creatures, but also the plans and intentions of men, are so governed by his providence that they are borne by it straight to their appointed end.⁶⁶

And yet we must not be understood to uphold the fate of the Stoics: for it is one thing to imagine a necessity which is involved in a complicated chain of causes, and quite another thing to believe that the world, and every part of it, is directed by the will of God. In the nature of things, I do acknowledge, there is uncertainty: but I maintain that nothing happens through a blind revolution of chance, for all is regulated by the will of God.⁶⁷

And, in his commentary on Acts 2:23, he says:

Some...confess that God...also govern[s] with his beck what things soever are done in this world. Nevertheless, they imagine a confused government, as if God did give liberty to his creatures to follow their own nature. They say that the sun is ruled by the will of God, because, in giving light to us, he doth his duty, which was once enjoined him by God. They think that man hath free-will after this sort left him, because his nature is disposed or inclined unto the free choice of good and evil. But they which think so do feign that God sitteth idle in heaven. The Scripture teacheth us far otherwise, which ascribeth unto God a special government in all things, and in man's actions. ⁶⁸

In his *Defence of the Secret Providence of God* Calvin states explicitly why he disagreed with the Stoics doctrine of fate.

What the vain imagination of the Stoics was, is well known. They wove their doctrine of fate out of Gordias' web of complex causes in which, when they had entangled God himself, they fabricated certain golden chains (as the fables have it) to bind the very God of heaven, and to make Him subject to inferior and secondary causes! The Stoics are imitated by the astrologers of the present day; who make their doctrine of fated necessity out of certain positions of the stars. We leave the Stoics then to their doctrine of fate: while we acknowledge the will of God to be the ruling cause of all things. ⁶⁹

Calvin is against both a providence in which God sits idly by and simply lets the world go on by itself, and one in which God creates an order of nature which determines the rest of history. In so doing, Calvin argues against both the Epicurean notion that chance decides everything (that God simply sits back in idleness), and the Stoic idea that the order of nature governs the universe. ⁷⁰

These two understandings of the way the world works, that chance ruled and nothing was determined, or that fate, necessity, and the order of nature ruled, were to challenge Calvin repeatedly. He was fighting two poles of the question of the nature of the governance of God. When denying that God merely sits back in idleness, he was presented with the problem of God determining everything that happens

in life such that human beings become puppets and fate rules. When denying that God determines everything, he was presented with the problem of the relationship between God's governance and human responsibility. Calvin wanted to cite a middle ground. God must have an active, primary hand, both in history and in individual human lives, but never to the extent that human responsibility is taken away.

If Calvin is going to steer a middle course between chance and fate, he is going to have to come to grips with the problem of human freedom. Thus, one of the toughest questions with which Reformed Christians are assailed with respect to Calvin's doctrine of providence is: How does Calvin reconcile human freedom with divine providence? Do human beings have freedom if God's providence has priority, and, more importantly, how does Calvin understand the relationship between human freedom and divine providence?⁷¹

2. HUMAN FREEDOM

Calvin's attempt to understand this relationship begins with his doctrine of humanity as the image of God (*imago Dei*). According to Genesis, humanity was made in God's image, and this means that the soul (Calvin divided the human being into two parts, body and soul, and considered the soul immortal) was the locus of the divine image and was made without blemish.⁷² The soul consists of understanding and will, the first being able to distinguish whether objects are good or evil, and the second to follow the first and act accordingly, i.e., "to choose and follow what the understanding pronounces good, but to reject and flee what it disapproves."⁷³

Adam himself was made with understanding and will and "by free

will had the power, if he so willed, to attain eternal life."⁷⁴ But Adam's will was made bendable and was not able to persevere,⁷⁵ and thus fell. Just because his will was made bendable does not mean that his fall was not of his own accord. It was. He destroyed himself.

The point of this analysis is that Calvin maintains two very important concepts: the total depravity of human nature (a direct result of Adam's fall) and that it is grace alone, not any human work or thought, which accomplishes salvation.⁷⁶

Within total depravity, Calvin maintains two considerations:

First, we are so vitiated and perverted in every part of our nature that by this great corruption we stand justly condemned and convicted before God, to whom nothing is acceptable but righteousness, innocence, and purity....[and] the second consideration: that this perversity never ceases in us....⁷⁷

Calvin consistently maintains that it is the whole human will which is depraved, that no part of it is left free of sin. He says, "...[t]he whole man is overwhelmed -- as by a deluge -- from head to foot, so that no part is immune from sin and all that proceeds from him is to be imputed to sin."⁷⁸ Sin has invaded humanity in such a way that nothing humanity can ever think or do or say will ever be without its taint. Everything contains mixed motives. No part of human nature is not affected by sin. The will is in bondage to the power of sin.

But how can freedom of choice be described once one acknowledges the will is totally depraved? Calvin tries, but seeks to avoid two problems in so doing. One is the complacency which arises when human beings are stripped of their own will and the "ability to pursue righteousness on [their] own",⁷⁹ and the second is depriving God of all honour and giving undue confidence to humanity when humanity is

given credit. He seeks to avoid complacency on the one hand and pride on the other. His aim is thus:

[When man has been taught that no good thing remains in his power, and that he is hedged about on all sides by most miserable necessity, in spite of this he should nevertheless be instructed to aspire to a good of which he is empty, to a freedom of which he has been deprived.⁸⁰

Calvin's aim is to keep humanity aspiring towards God's will while admitting that the will is totally depraved and cannot do it. The tension between complacency and pride is a constant one for Calvin. He must affirm the total depravity of the will while not letting humanity fall into complacency, yet attempt to describe a freedom of choice which does no damage to God's honour and sovereignty.

Calvin's answer to the tension, in Book II, Chapter 2, is the Holy Spirit (II.2.20, 26-27) and, beginning in Chapter 3.5, the grace of God. Grace alone is what converts the human will and corrects it.⁸¹ Grace alone is what gives the will any ability to will anything good at all.⁸² He infers from Paul in Philippians 2:13 that "everything good in the will is the work of grace alone",⁸³ and he quotes Bernard, "simply to will is of man; to will ill of a corrupt nature; to will well, of grace."⁸⁴ Indeed he stresses the grace of God as the sole effector of anything good which comes from the will. Nothing good, absolutely nothing, can come from the human will without grace.

Although "grace alone" solves, for Calvin, the tension between complacency and pride, he has not yet answered the actual question of the freedom of the human will. He maintains that God has created all things and gives action to everyone, but evil actions come from a depraved nature. He quotes Augustine's saying, "The fact that men sin

is their own doing; that they by sinning do this or that comes from the power of God, who divides the darkness as he pleases."⁸⁵ The fact that human beings have the ability to do anything comes from God, but whenever they sin, that comes from their nature which is depraved. Anything that humanity does which is good comes from God alone.

This means that humanity is never relieved from responsibility for their actions. Calvin opposes any attempt to lay the blame for evil or evil actions on God, nor will he allow humanity to dissolve into desperation and despair.⁸⁶ Humanity cannot get out from under taking responsibility for their evil actions, nor can hope and striving toward the future be written off as useless. He maintains, against the Libertines, that precaution for the future and human responsibility are vital.⁸⁷

This means that we are not at all hindered by God's eternal decrees either from looking ahead for ourselves or from putting all our affairs in order, but always in submission to his will. The reason is obvious. For he who has set the limits to our life has at the same time entrusted to us its care....⁸⁸

By this Calvin also distinguishes between what God does and what Satan attempts.

[I]n the same work there is always a great difference between what the Lord does and what Satan and the wicked try to do. God makes these evil instruments, which he holds under his hand and can turn wherever he pleases, to serve his justice. They, as they are evil, by their action give birth to a wickedness conceived in their depraved nature.⁸⁹

God makes all things, but when evil is done, it is always done from a depraved nature.

Good, however, comes from grace alone. When good is done or harm is rejected, all this is through God's grace.⁹⁰ This, Calvin says, is the "force of God's providence", that "not only that things occur as

he foresees to be expedient, but that men's wills also incline to the same end."²¹

And, lest there be any mistaking the relative priorities of God's sovereignty and providence, and human freedom, Calvin's case comes to a climax in II.4.7.: "In each case God's dominion stands above our freedom."²² God's sovereignty and providence overrule human freedom.

God, whenever he wills to make way for his providence, bends and turns men's wills even in external things; nor are they so free to choose that God's will does not rule over their freedom. Whether you will or not, daily experience compels you to realize that your mind is guided by God's prompting rather than by your own freedom to choose.²³

Thus, Calvin maintains that human freedom has been lost due to Adam's fall and original sin, and its corollary, total depravity, is everywhere evident. Yet, in attempting to preserve a tension between complacency and pride, he maintains grace and makes it the other necessary element, along with total depravity, in describing the freedom of the will.²⁴

Calvin stood against the notion that human beings have a will unfettered and uncontrolled by God's will and providence. To repeat:

God, whenever he wills to make way for his providence, bends and turns men's wills even in external things; nor are they so free to choose that God's will does not rule over their freedom. Whether you will or not, daily experience compels you to realize that your mind is guided by God's prompting rather than by your own freedom to choose.²⁵

It is evident that Calvin did not manage to remain aloof to the challenge presented to him. Nor did he manage to steer a clear course between chance and fate. He diligently sought to maintain a clear separation between the Christian faith and Stoic philosophy, even to set up his own theology as the place in between the Epicurean and Stoic ideas of providence. He sought to show that Christianity need

not descend into either error.

But did he succeed? It is the contention here that in seeking clearly to distinguish his doctrine of providence from the Stoic one, Calvin did not see that he nevertheless came so close to a Stoic doctrine of providence so as, at times, one can hardly distinguish the two, especially with respect to the deterministic element. It is obvious that Calvin did not want a doctrine of providence similar to the Stoic. But despite his own best instincts Calvin proposed a doctrine of providence that allowed for certain elements of Stoic fatalism. Calvin, though unintentionally, allowed his early education and the battles he was fighting against those who would compromise God's sovereignty to seep into his theology almost unnoticed. While never intending it, he made God's providence so close to a Stoic fatalism that it is difficult to tell the difference.

C. Accommodation

Accommodation is the term used by Calvin to denote the fact that we cannot see God for who God is, but God must accommodate God's self to our finite and sinful eyes.⁹⁶ In order for humanity to understand what God is up to in this world and God's providence, God must reveal God's self in a way that human beings can understand. That may mean that human words are used to refer to God in accommodation to human beings, even though it may not mean exactly the same thing.

For example, in I. 17. 12., Calvin seeks to discuss the question of repentance by God.

God's repenting is several times mentioned, as when he repented of having created man (Gen. 6:6); of having put Saul over the kingdom (1 Sam. 15:11); and of his going to repent of the evil that he had determined to inflict upon his people, as soon as he sensed any change of heart in

them. (Jer. 18:8)⁹⁷

It would seem that God determines what happens to humanity according to what humanity does, according to their actions. "Hence many contend that God has not determined the affairs of men by an eternal decree, but that, according to each man's deserts or according as he deems him fair and just, he decrees this or that each year, each day, and each hour."⁹⁸ But that is not the case. The true teaching of scripture is that "God's ordinance in the managing of human affairs is both everlasting and above all repentance: His plan and will proceed unchangeably from eternity."⁹⁹ Thus, the use of the word "repent" is for the benefit of humanity, who cannot understand the ways of God. This is God accommodating God's self to human understanding. "God represents Himself to us not as He is in Himself, but as He seems to us, to accommodate to our weak capacity His description of Himself."¹⁰⁰ Thus, Calvin can say:

What, therefore, does the word "repentance" mean? Surely its meaning is like that of all other modes of speaking that describe God for us in human terms. For because our weakness does not attain to his exalted state, the description of him that is given to us must be accommodated to our capacity so that we may understand it. Now the mode of accommodation is for him to represent himself to us not as he is in himself, but as he seems to us.¹⁰¹

This also refers to God clothing God's self in ways that humanity can understand. "I have therefore already remarked that God's providence does not always meet us in its naked form, but God in a sense clothes it with the means employed."¹⁰²

There is no way humanity itself can understand God, but only as God accommodates God's self to it. These accommodations Calvin often calls "sparks" because they are the elements of God's providence which humanity can understand.

In this sense the term "fate" is often repeated in Ecclesiastes, because at first glance men do not penetrate to the first cause, which is deeply hidden. And yet what is set forth in Scripture concerning God's secret providence was never so extinguished from men's hearts without some sparks always glowing in the darkness.¹⁰³

This is also why events in human life and history can seem to happen by chance or appear fortuitous.

Therefore I shall put it this way: however all things may be ordained by God's plan, according to a sure dispensation, for us they are fortuitous....But since the order, reason, end, and necessity of those things which happen for the most part lie hidden in God's purpose, and are not apprehended by human opinion, those things, which it is certain take place by God's will, are in a sense fortuitous. They bear on the face of them no other appearance, whether they are considered in their own nature or weighed according to our knowledge and judgment.¹⁰⁴

In a discussion in the *Institutes* on the book of Job, he reminds the readers that there is a declaration which points out the difference in God and humanity, which again is to show that God must accommodate God's self to humanity.

For after the author, in surveying above and below the frame of the universe, has magnificently discoursed concerning God's works, he finally adds: "Behold! These are but the outskirts of his ways, and how small a thing is heard therein!" [Job 26:14] In this way he distinguishes in another place between the wisdom that resides with God and the portion of wisdom God has prescribed for men. For when he has discoursed on the secrets of nature, he says that wisdom is known to God alone, but "eludes the eyes of all the living" [Job 28:21].¹⁰⁵

Basically, although God may come across to human perception in one or perhaps diverse ways, God is always making allowances for the lack of human understanding.

Although he is beyond all disturbance of mind, yet he testifies that he is angry toward sinners. Therefore whenever we hear that God is angered, we ought not to imagine any emotion in him, but rather to consider that this expression has been taken from our own human experience; because God, whenever he is exercising judgment, exhibits the appearance of one kindled and angered.¹⁰⁶

Let those for whom this seems harsh consider for a little while how bearable their squeamishness is in refusing a thing attested by clear Scriptural proofs because it exceeds their mental capacity, and find fault that things are put forth publicly, which if God had not judged useful for men to know, he would never have bidden his prophets and apostles to teach.¹⁰⁷

Clearly, within the doctrine of providence, God is every bit as accommodating as was seen in Chapter 1. It has been suggested that Calvin thought God accommodated God's self in three different ways: in revelation, in scripture and in Christ,¹⁰⁸ and one could hardly disagree. It was a strong and influential element of Calvin's understanding of scripture and God.

On the face of it, Calvin was astute in speaking of God's accommodation of God's self to humankind. One would be hard pressed to say that God does not accommodate God's self in some way to both finite and sinful human understanding.

But where does this leave us? How can we be sure that where God is accommodating God's self to our capacity, we are encountering the real and true God? From a Barthian perspective, if, as Calvin said, "the mode of accommodation is for him to represent himself to us not as he is in himself, but as he seems to us",¹⁰⁹ then who are we encountering? We must ask the question to Calvin, "Who is Jesus Christ for you?" We must answer that question in order to see if and how Christ was God's accommodation to humanity.

Jesus Christ, for Calvin, was the centre around which all theology revolved. Calvin recognized that many of the abuses of the medieval church were linked to their insistence that the church had sole authority to interpret scripture and thus to determine what it meant for individuals and for community.¹¹⁰ For Calvin, Jesus Christ

was the Word of God and the one who interpreted scripture.

For us, if Jesus Christ was the Word of God, the one Word of God for Calvin, the question remains, "Who is this God in himself who is different from the God revealed to us in Jesus Christ?" If the God revealed to us in Jesus Christ is the centre around which all theology revolved, then who is the God in himself, the hidden God?

This leads us to another element within Calvin's doctrine of providence -- that of the secret plan. If we are not sure whom we are encountering when Calvin explains God's accommodation to us, we are left in the dark even more by Calvin's insistence on a secret plan of God which is left beyond us. We shall remain in the dark. And it is because of this secret plan that God must accommodate God's self to us. Because of this secret plan, God cannot allow us to encounter the real and true God.

GOD'S SECRET PLAN

According to Calvin, God's has a secret plan which humankind cannot fathom. The reason why God has to accommodate God's self to human minds is because God has a secret plan which humanity cannot understand.

Yet since the sluggishness of our mind lies far beneath the height of God's providence, we must employ a distinction to lift it up. Therefore I shall put it this way: however all things may be ordained by God's plan, according to a sure dispensation, for us they are fortuitous....But since the order, reason, end, and necessity of those things which happen for the most part lie hidden in God's purpose, and are not apprehended by human opinion, those things, which it is certain take place by God's will, are in a sense fortuitous.'''

In this sense the term "fate" is often repeated in Ecclesiastes, because at first glance men do not penetrate to the first cause, which is deeply hidden. And yet what is set forth in Scripture concerning God's secret providence was never so extinguished from men's hearts without some

sparks always glowing in the darkness.¹¹²

God has a secret plan which the human race cannot understand. As it has been said:

Calvin's doctrine of providence, or the continuing relation of Creator and creation, is permeated in an almost uncanny manner with the immediate presence of a mysterious will. Every wind, every drop of rain, is a special volition of God's will. Man is consciously surrounded by its work. Yet it remains a mysterious will emanating from the 'secret purpose of the Father,' his 'secret' or 'mysterious judgments,' or his 'secret counsel.' 'God claims a power unknown to us in governing the world,' and while it is not an unjust will, 'the reasons governing it are concealed from us.'¹¹³

While events seem fortuitous or unexplainable to humanity, to God they are part of the secret plan. Numerous times Calvin speaks of a secret plan¹¹⁴ or a secret command or direction.¹¹⁵

Not, indeed, that absolute will of which the Sophists babble, by an impious and profane distinction separating his justice from his power -- but providence, that determinative principle of all things, from which flows nothing but right, although the reasons have been hidden from us.¹¹⁶

In his exegesis of Jacob procuring Esau's blessing, Calvin speaks of hidden providence, for Calvin reminds us that there was no need for Rachel to deceive Isaac since the blessing had already been intended for Jacob in God's secret providence.¹¹⁷ So also, in his exegesis of the Joseph story, Calvin speaks of God's providence which we cannot know but must acknowledge as God's secret governing of the world.¹¹⁸

Calvin's doctrine of providence is multifaceted. He is both fighting what it is not and explaining what it is, and this creates many dimensions.

From a Barthian perspective, the results of his doctrine of providence, however, remain in two camps, stemming most likely from his position of both theologian and pastor. On the one hand he wants

to maintain, as a theologian, the position that it is neither chance nor fate. The providence of God has nothing to do with the god or gods of the philosophers who did not know the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Providence declares nothing resembling a god who sits back and lets the world go by so that there is no order or structure to the world. Calvin will not agree with those who proclaim that everything takes place by chance and only disorder and chaos rule.

By the same token Calvin fights a doctrine of providence which so orders the world that human beings become mere puppets, and God so rules that there are no decisions to make and no freedom for humanity. Fate cannot be what providence is about.

As a pastor, Calvin is solely interested in the comfort of his flock, the reassurance of his parishioners. His emphasis is less on the questions of chance and fate as on the comfort and grace of God towards God's children. No longer need believers worry about the status of their salvation or questions about where evil events come from, but simply turn their eyes towards God and worship him. It is as if Calvin speaks out of both sides of his mouth, according to whether he is fighting off the pagans or comforting his people.

There are, however, questions remaining in his doctrine. His understanding of a secret plan which human beings cannot know and, as we saw earlier, a hidden will which we cannot know, leads us to two questions: first, does the deterministic element of Calvin's doctrine of providence stand perilously close to deterministic elements within Stoicism, i.e., despite the difference, that Calvin has described the providential God as a personal being and the Stoics have described theirs as an impersonal force, are they not two varieties of the genus

determinism?; ¹¹⁹ and second, does his doctrine of providence reflect two opposing wills within God despite his real and consistent attempts to refute it? To look at these questions more closely we will first need to look at Calvin's doctrine of predestination, for although they are located in two separate Books of the *Institutes*, they are closely connected with one another. It is to this doctrine that we now turn.

ENDNOTES -- CHAPTER 2

¹I. 16. 1.

²B. W. Farley says that it is because God is active and personally involved in history that Calvin can take providence away from rational speculation and cause and effect theories. It becomes an issue of faith and therefore some theologians have said that Calvin believed that there is no general providence. As we continue in our explication of Calvin's doctrine, we will see otherwise. (*The Providence of God*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1988, pp. 151-2.)

³I. 16. 1.

⁴I. 5. 5.

⁵I. 16. 4.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸I. 16. 1.

⁹I. 16. 4.

¹⁰I. 5. 7.

¹¹I. 16. 7.

¹²*Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines*, ed. B. W. Farley, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1982., p. 244.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 243.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 243-4.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 244.

¹⁶Cf. P. H. Reardon, "Calvin on Providence: The Development of An Insight", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 28, and Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, Lutterworth Press, London, 1956, pp. 73-4. Cf. also Calvin's *Defence of Secret Providence*, pp. 5-7.

¹⁷I. 16. 6.

¹⁸I. 16. 7.

¹⁹"Since God elects by his providence and he provides for his elect, God's particular and special providence for the believer seems to be identical with predestination, but Calvin did not develop this position." (C. Partee, "Calvin and Determinism", *Christian Scholars Review*, 5, 1975, p. 127.)

²⁰C. Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1977, p. 95. While Calvin's basic understanding was this way, the question will stand: Why did he not begin with special providence? Why did he not see that special providence points to the revelation in Jesus Christ? These questions will remain with us as we continue.

²¹I. 5. 1-2; I. 14. 20.

²²Cf. I. 6-11.

²³I. 17. 7.

²⁴I. 17. 2., underline added.

²⁵*Ibid.*, underline added.

²⁶I. 18. 4., underline added.

²⁷*Against the Libertines*, p. 253. "Calvin's doctrine of providence, or the continuing relation of Creator and creation, is permeated in an almost uncanny manner with the immediate presence of a mysterious will. Every wind, every drop of rain, is a special volition of God's will. Man is consciously surrounded by its work. Yet it remains a mysterious will emanating from the 'secret purpose of the Father,' his 'secret' or 'mysterious judgments,' or his 'secret counsel.' 'God claims a power unknown to us in governing the world,' and while it is not an unjust will, 'the reasons governing it are concealed from us.'" (E. A. Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*, Columbia University Press, New York and London, 1952, p. 7.)

²⁸Farley rightly shows that Calvin never wanted a hidden providence or hidden will in God to be seen in terms of "blind, menacing power." The great abyss "within God is never to be absolutized as a naked principle." God's justice cannot be separated from God's wisdom nor from God's power, and thus they must be understood together. (Farley, *The Providence of God*, p. 153.)

²⁹*Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia*, trans. F. L. Battles and A. M. Hugo, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1969. Hereafter it will be referred to as *de Clementia*.

In the Preface the translators say, "It is the purpose of the present publication to introduce to a wider circle of readers the classicism of John Calvin on the eve of conversion." (p. ix) It is important to notice their insistence on Calvin's "classicism", as well as their reference to his conversion. This classicism is what is referred to in this essay as Calvin's use of philosophy, and although the question and date of Calvin's conversion is much debated, reference to it is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

T. H. L. Parker says: "The book is a straightforward commentary, with the original text printed at the head of each chapter and expositions of individual sentences following in order. No attempt is made to extract the *loci*, there are no excursus. The understanding of the total meaning is reached by a continuous exegesis and exposition

of the language. Anyone who knows Calvin's biblical commentaries will find himself in familiar country as he travels through this commentary. Here is the same form, the same approach to problems of thought and language, the same style, the same diction. But, of course, this book came first; and what we are really saying is that Calvin used for his New Testament commentaries fundamentally the same form that he had used when expounding the Stoic *De Clementia*." (*Calvin's NT Commentaries*, SCM Press, London, pp. 49-50.)

³⁰*de Clementia*, p. 67.

³¹*Ibid.*

³²*Ibid.*, p. 281.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 291.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶"A prominent theme in Calvin's later writing is represented here: providence vs. fortune. Already Calvin shows his distaste for the Epicureans' theological views: they postulate gods who live a life of pleasure withdrawn from mortals; they deny providence and accept chance as determinative. Calvin has read his Cicero with profit. How frequently in his later works does Calvin advert to this theme! Fortune, too, Calvin already rejects in 1532, although he concedes its common (if improper) use as a term for 'God', and quotes classical authors who use it to refer to man's God-given station in this life. In his thought on providence and fortune, Calvin already betrays later preferences. Already he repudiates Epicurean notions; later he will identify these views with the Libertines. Later he will dissociate himself more clearly from Stoic views; here, though, he is too much influenced by Cicero and Augustine to accept the Stoic picture of the passionless wise man." (Battles and Hugo, *Op. cit.*, p. 131*)

³⁷*de Clementia*, p. 19.

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁴¹Reardon, P.H., *Op. cit.*, p. 525.

⁴²*de Clementia*, p. 107.

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁴⁴I. 17. 8.

⁴⁵*de Clementia*, p. 109.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 349.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁵²Cf. the quotation for n. 14.

⁵³Battles and Hugo state that Stoicism "posed" for Christianity "an extremely nice problem" because its ethical system was so similar. Christianity could point to Stoicism in several respects as a philosophical system which agreed with many of its tenets. They quote F.W. Farrar's remarks about Seneca:

Whatever may have been the dark and questionable actions of his life,...it is certain that as a philosopher and as a moralist, he furnishes us with the grandest and most eloquent series of truths to which, unilluminated by Christianity, the thoughts of men have ever attained. The purest and most exalted sect of antiquity was 'the sect of the Stoics,' and Stoicism never found a literary exponent more ardent, more eloquent, or more enlightened than Lucius Annaeus Seneca. So nearly, in fact, does he seem to have arrived at the truths of Christianity, that to many it seemed a marvel that he could have known them without having heard them from inspired lips. (*Op. cit.*, pp. 49*-50*)

"Suffice it to recall that Seneca had a very high standing among the Fathers of the Church, and that Lactantius voiced a wide-spread opinion when, quoting Seneca, he exclaimed: 'What could anyone who knew god have said more true than this, which was said by a man ignorant of true religion?'" (*Op. cit.*, pp. 49*-50*)

⁵⁴"But the more significant point is whether Calvin, in the very act of rejecting, has nevertheless retained some Stoic insights and perspectives." (E. Grislis, "Seneca and Cicero as Possible Sources of John Calvin's view of Double Predestination: An Inquiry in the History of Ideas", *In Honor of John Calvin*, ed. E.J. Furcha, ARC Supplement #3, Faculty of Religious Studies, McGill University, Montreal, 1987, pp.31-2.)

"The Biblical idea of Providence has certain non-Christian parallels. Even Platonism, but above all the Stoics, knew the idea of an all-inclusive and all-determining divine Providence....[W]e must take into account the fact that in the history of Christian theology these two streams flow into one another, and indeed that this is one of the most important points for the synthesis between Christianity

and the ancient world." (E. Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption, Dogmatics, vol. 2*, Lutterworth Press, London, 1952, p. 155.)

⁵⁵Victor L. Nuovo points out that Calvin criticized the Stoic doctrine of providence 'not because he regarded it as essentially wrong, but because it did not go far enough.' That is, unlike the Stoics, Calvin believed that 'it was precisely the individuals's awareness of God's special care and favour (grace) that constituted the greatest value of the doctrine of providence.' (Grislis, *Op. cit.*, p. 33.)

"Calvin knew Plato and Aristotle, Seneca and Cicero too well to be entirely independent of them. Their views neither constituted nor determined Calvin's understanding, but they contributed to it." (C. Partee, "Calvin and Experience", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 26, 1973, p. 177.)

⁵⁶Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, (Methuen & Co., London, 1896).

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, I. xvii.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, I. xx.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

⁶⁰I. 2. 2.

⁶¹I. 16. 4.

⁶²*Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, vol. 1. Trans. Rev. J. Anderson, (Edinburgh, The Edinburgh Printing Co., 1845), Ps. 33:13, p. 549.

⁶³I. 4. 2.

⁶⁴Cicero, *De Divinatione*, (Leob Classical Library, London and New York, 1923), I. lv. 125-6.

⁶⁵I. 16. 3.

⁶⁶I. 16. 8.

⁶⁷*Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. 1. Trans. Rev. Wm. Pringle, (Edinburgh, The Edinburgh Printing Co., 1845), pp. 464-5.

⁶⁸*Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 1, Trans. H. Beveridge, Esq., (Edinburgh, The Edinburgh Printing Co., 1859), pp. 57-8.

⁶⁹*A Defence of the Secret Providence of God*, 1558, Part 2, Calvin's Calvinism, (London, Wertheim and Macintosh, 1857), p. 14.

⁷⁰Cf: Reardon quote about being in a boat with no oars. (note 41.) Also: I.16.3.; In a footnote to the word "Sophists", the editor says, "'Sophistae.' The word is used by Calvin, in common with the other Reformers and with many Humanists, to designate the Scholastic writers when these are treated adversely." *Institutes*, vol.1, p. 200, n5.

Berkouwer notes: "The relation between belief in fate, fortune, *Schicksal*, or *Vorsehung* and the Christian faith is not one of relative depth or breadth. There is a radical break, an absolute difference between them. While the terms used may seem identical, the gulf between the contents is as wide as the heavens. There is no common background to the various ideas of Providence. Each arises from its own basic God-concept. History illustrates the results of a confession of Providence without Christ, whether in the form of a religiously clothed national socialism or in the conclusions of a consistent natural theology." (G.C. Berkouwer, *The Providence of God*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., Grand Rapids, Mich., *Studies in Dogmatics*, 1952, pp. 45-6.)

⁷¹Mary Potter Engel, in her book, *John Calvin's Perspectival Anthropology*, argues that Calvin's views about human freedom of the will (*libera voluntas*), and free choice (*liberum arbitrium*), must be seen from different perspectives -- the human and the divine. From the human perspective free will (*libera voluntas*), although corrupted in the Fall, has not been lost, and therefore freedom from coercion is affirmed and human beings are free, although not free to choose the good. From the divine perspective, free choice (*liberum arbitrium*), the ability to choose between good and evil, has been lost, and freedom is wholly lost.

While this perspectival analysis is useful for understanding Calvin's seemingly dichotomous views concerning the freedom of human beings, she makes the observation that from the perspective of God as Redeemer, Calvin seeks to demonstrate 1) that God is the principle cause but not the author of evil, 2) that human beings retain freedom from coercion even after the Fall, and 3) that God is judge in election and justification. None of these take into consideration the fact that God as Redeemer means God as Jesus Christ. Her analysis clearly shows that Calvin could analyse the doctrine of providence and human freedom without considering Jesus Christ as the interpreter or exemplar of God's providence and the one who undergirds and secures human freedom. (American Academy of Religion Academy Series, No. 52, Scholars Press, Atlanta, Ga., 1988.)

⁷²I. 15. 1-3.

⁷³I. 15. 7.

⁷⁴I. 15. 8.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*

⁷⁶Here again Calvin's insistence on salvation by grace alone, is made evident.

⁷⁷II. 1. 8.

⁷⁸II. 1. 9.

⁷⁹II. 2. 1.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*

⁸¹II. 3. 6.

⁸²II. 3. 7.

⁸³II. 3. 6.

⁸⁴II. 3. 5.

⁸⁵II. 4. 4.

⁸⁶I. 17. 3.

⁸⁷I. 17. 3-5.

⁸⁸I. 17. 4.

⁸⁹II. 4. 5.

⁹⁰II. 4. 6.

⁹¹*Ibid.*

⁹²II. 4. 7.

⁹³*Ibid.*

⁹⁴C.J. Kinlaw points out that Calvin wants to maintain two different levels of agency -- divine and human -- yet does not give human beings any sense of co-operation with God's will. Finally, Calvin does not give human beings any sense of independent agency and thus, according to Kinlaw, cannot be considered responsible agents. Kinlaw reminds us that Calvin is "guarded in what he concludes from his arguments. He desires to secure only a minimal sense of human agency that will enable him to make the theological claim that human being is morally responsible." (503) The results of this problem, the problem of Calvin's determinism, will be seen through the rest of this chapter as well as Chapter Three. (Kinlaw, "Determinism and the Hiddenness of God in Calvin's Theology", *Religious Studies*, 24, 4, pp. 497-509.)

⁹⁵II. 4. 7.

⁹⁶The difference between God's accommodating God's self to finite eyes or sinful eyes has been discussed in chapter 1.

⁹⁷I. 17. 12.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*

⁹⁹F.L. Battles, "God Was Accommodating Himself to Human Capacity", *Interpretation*, 31.1. 1977., p. 27.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁰¹I. 17. 13., underline added.

¹⁰²I. 17. 4.

¹⁰³I. 16. 9.

¹⁰⁴I. 16. 9., CF. F.L. Battles, "God Was Accommodating Himself to Human Capacity". Battles sets up the accommodation this way: Apparent teaching of Scripture: The same fate awaits man and beast, good man and sinner, wise man and fool (cf. Eccl. 2:14f; 3:19; 9:2-3, 11). True Teaching: Fate, fortune, chance are pagan terms inadmissible to Christian; nothing is fortuitous, but all things live under God's secret plan. Accommodation: The sluggishness and limits of the human mind see as fortuitous those things which are actually ordered by God's purpose: Scripture uses "fate" and "fortune" to explain events seemingly contingent, but known to faith to derive from a secret impulse of God. p. 27.

¹⁰⁵I. 17. 2.

¹⁰⁶I. 17. 13.

¹⁰⁷I. 18. 4.

¹⁰⁸Tony Baxter, "What did Calvin teach about Accommodation?" *Evangel*, Spring 1988, pp. 20-22.

¹⁰⁹I. 17. 3.

¹¹⁰Gerrish, "The Word of God and the Words of Scripture", *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1982, pp. 51-68.

¹¹¹I. 16. 9.

¹¹²*Ibid.*

¹¹³Dowey, *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

¹¹⁴I. 16. 2, 3; I. 17. 1, 2.

¹¹⁵I. 18. 1.

¹¹⁶I. 17. 2.

¹¹⁷J. Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses called Genesis*, trans. the Rev. John King, vol. 1, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1989, pp. 77-103.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, 377-381; 486-88.

¹¹⁹Brunner says that although Calvin claims to reject fate and the deterministic view of Stoicism, Calvin "introduces it again without calling it by its right name." (p. 174) Even though Calvin makes his a personal determinism, it contains many of the Stoic impersonal elements of determinism. (E. Brunner, *Op. cit.*, pp. 148-174.

THE DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION

In Chapters 1 and 2 we saw the context in which Calvin places his doctrine of providence and the content of it. He places providence within the Word of God (the special revelation of scripture), which itself is within the knowledge of God the Creator. We also saw how the issues of revelation, philosophy, accommodation and the Word of God all help to explicate Calvin's doctrines of the knowledge of God and of providence. All were issues which are necessary to gain an understanding of how Calvin went about his theological task.

A discussion of Calvin's doctrine of providence, however, also necessitates a discussion of the doctrine of predestination because the two doctrines were intertwined for so long in the various editions of the *Institutes* and because they include many of these same issues.

Calvin places his doctrine of election, or predestination, at the end of Book III, well after God the Creator and the Redeemer of Books I and II.¹ One can assume his discussions of the Creator and Redeemer to this point, as well as his soteriological message of Book III, namely, faith, regeneration, the Christian life and justification.² Indeed, while Books I and II discussed the question of knowledge in relation to the Creator and Redeemer, Book III has an entirely different focus. Entitled, *The Way in Which We Receive the Grace of Christ: What benefits come to us from it, and what effects follow*, it has less to do with knowledge of God than with the experience of human life as a Christian. "The logical sequence is that of a shift of

discussion from the *grounds* of redemption to its *actualization*."³

There are two main issues which need to be addressed in Calvin's doctrine of predestination: the Word of God and accommodation. We have seen how they have come up in our discussion of Calvin's doctrines of the knowledge of God and providence, and it is now left to be shown their importance for his doctrine of predestination.

A. Elements of Election

Up to now we have seen that the Word of God, for Calvin, has two elements: scripture and Jesus Christ.⁴ Both are vital for his understanding of the Christian faith. Both tell us of God. While both of these will be important again for predestination, let us understand that Calvin's doctrine of predestination is primarily christological.⁵ Calvin believed that it is only through Christ that we know of election and only through Christ that we are elected. Christ, for Calvin, is the pivotal point into the doctrine of predestination.⁶

If we desire anything more than to be reckoned among God's sons and heirs, we have to rise above Christ. If this is our ultimate goal, how insane are we to seek outside him what we have already obtained in him, and can find in him alone?⁷

But if we have been chosen in him, we shall not find assurance of our election in ourselves; and not even in God the Father, if we conceive him as severed from his Son. Christ, then, is the mirror wherein we must, and without self-deception may, contemplate our own election.⁸

He calls Christ the "Author of election",⁹ and "...those whom God has adopted as his sons are said to have been chosen not in themselves but in his Christ."¹⁰ We picture our election as election in Christ. Election itself is within God's eternal decree, but the way humanity ought to come to it and view it is through Christ.

I do not merely send men off to the secret election of God to await with gaping mouth salvation there. I bid them make their way directly to Christ in whom salvation is offered to us, which otherwise would have lain hidden in God.¹¹

Scripture everywhere declares that God gives to His Son those who were His, calls those whom He elects, and begets again by His Spirit those He had adopted as sons; and finally that those men whom He teaches inwardly and to whom His arm is revealed believe. Hence, whoever holds faith to be earnest and pledge of grace confesses that it flows from divine election as its eternal source. Yet knowledge of salvation is not to be demanded by us out of the secret counsel of God. Life is set before us in Christ, who not only makes Himself known in the Gospel but also presents Himself to be enjoyed. Let the eye of faith look fixedly in this mirror, and not try to penetrate where access is not open. Since this is the way, let the sons of God walk in it, lest, by flying higher than is right, they plunge themselves into a deeper labyrinth than they had wished. For the rest, as there is no other gate into the kingdom of heaven than faith in Christ contained in the promises of the Gospel clearly set before us, it is the most crass stupidity not to acknowledge that the eyes of our mind are opened by God, since, before we were conceived in the womb, He chose us to be faithful.¹²

And finally, "Christ therefore is for us the bright mirror of the eternal and hidden election of God, and also the earnest and pledge."¹³

Clearly, Christ is the locus of election. Christ is where we begin. It is an election based solely on God's good pleasure in Christ. It means there is no amount of good works or merit which will induce God to save us.

1. MERIT OR WORTH

Because Christ is where we begin in predestination, Calvin reacts vehemently against election having anything to do with human merit or worth. He is adamant that election comes solely from God's direction, and is not based on anything human.

...[L]et those now come forward who would bind God's election either to the worthiness of men or to the merit of

works. Since they see one nation preferred above all others, and hear that God was not for any reason moved to be more favorably inclined to a few, ignoble...men, will they quarrel with him because he chose to give such evidence of his mercy?...[T]he Israelites are recalled to this principle of a freely given covenant when thanks are to be given to God, or when hope is to be aroused for the age to come. 'He has made us and not we ourselves,' says the prophet....The negative, which is added to exclude 'ourselves,' is not superfluous, since by it they may know that God is not only the Author of all good things in which they abound but has derived the cause from himself, because nothing in them was worthy of so great honor.¹⁴

He says, "By saying that they were 'elect before the creation of the world', he [Paul] takes away all regard for worth."¹⁵

When Paul teaches that we were chosen in Christ 'before the creation of the world', he takes away all consideration of real worth on our part....¹⁶

...Paul declares all virtue appearing in man is the result of election.¹⁷

...[T]he salvation of believers has been founded upon the decision of divine election alone, and that this favor is not earned by works but comes from free calling.¹⁸

Do they ask how it happens that of two men indistinguishable in merit, God in his election passes over one but takes the other? I, in turn, ask: 'Do they think that there is anything in him who is taken that disposes God to him?' If they admit that there is nothing, as they must, it will follow that God does not consider the man but seeks from his own goodness the reason to do him good. The fact that God therefore chooses one man but rejects another arises not out of regard to the man but solely from his mercy, which ought to be free to manifest and express itself where and when he pleases.¹⁹

Election, according to Calvin, is not human beings electing themselves, either through merit or works. He is fighting the commonly held view that it is our merit which seals our fate with God. Roman Catholicism believed, according to Calvin, that there is the grace of God, but actually it is what comes after grace, our ability, which accomplishes our salvation. Calvin reminds us that in Romans 9-11, Paul goes against the Jews who claimed grace by their own merit.

This discussion arose from the pride and false boasting of the Jewish people. For when they claimed for themselves the name 'church,' they wanted belief in the gospel to depend upon their decision. Today, in like manner, the papists with this false pretext would willingly substitute themselves for God.²⁰

Pighius, too, believed that in God's foreknowledge God knew who would and who would not respond to God's grace, and thus saved only those whom God knew would respond. In *The Eternal Predestination of God*, he sums up the argument for the opposition by stating Pighius' case:

Both [Pighius and George the Sicilian] imagine that it lies within his freedom whether one is partaker of the grace of adoption; and it does not depend on the counsel of God who are elect and who reprobate; but that each determines for himself one state or the other by his own will. That some believe in the gospel and others remain unbelieving is a difference, they hold, arising not from God's free election or His secret counsel, but from the will of each individual.²¹

Calvin spends the entire treatise discussing this question in various ways, and never gives up his position that God does the electing and humanity can only be elected. It is extremely important to note this point because it is vastly different from what the Church was saying in Calvin's own time, that humanity had to gain its own salvation, and in so doing kept the people in a state of fear.

Paul further confirms this, declaring that God was moved by no external cause; He Himself and in Himself was author and cause of our being elected while yet we were not created....²²

Who does not see that the eternal purpose of God is set over against ours?...It is now, I think sufficiently demonstrated who they are whom God calls by the Gospel to the hope of salvation, whom He engrafts into the body of Christ, and whom He makes heirs of eternal life: it is those whom by His eternal and secret counsel He adopted to Himself as sons. So far was God from being moved by their faith to adopt them, that rather election is the cause and beginning of faith.²³

And in the same treatise, concerning Romans 8, he says:

For after saying that all things are an assistance to the faithful who love God, lest men should seek the source of their happiness in themselves, as if by their love they anticipated God and merited such benefit from Him, Paul immediately adds by way of correction: Who are called according to His purpose. Thus we see that he expressly secures priority for God; for by His calling He causes them to begin to love Him who could do nothing but hate.²⁴

In much the same way, while election cannot be seen to be related to any merit or worth of humanity, it is also important to see that it bears no relation to the foreknowledge of God.

2. FOREKNOWLEDGE

In fighting every attempt to diminish the fact that election comes only from God, Calvin has to confront the question of divine foreknowledge just as he had to the problem of human merit. In fact, they are related. The issue revolves around the question of whether God foreknew which persons would believe in the gospel. God could have foreknown who would believe and thus have predestined them to eternal life. Thus both positions, one which demands that it be the work of God and the other which necessitates a human cooperation with the divine plan, could be appeased. To this plan too, Calvin gave a resounding "No!"

Many persons dispute all these positions which we have set forth, especially the free election of believers; nevertheless, this cannot be shaken. For generally these persons consider that God distinguishes among men according as he foresees what the merits of each will be. Therefore, he adopts as sons those whom he foreknows will not be unworthy of his grace; he appoints to the damnation of death those whose dispositions he discerns will be inclined to evil intention and ungodliness. By thus covering election with a veil of foreknowledge, they obscure it.... We teach nothing not borne out by experience: that God has always been free to bestow his grace on whom he wills.²⁵

If God only foresaw human events, and did not also dispose and determine them by his decision, then there would be some point in raising this question: whether his foreseeing had

anything to do with their necessity. But since he foresees future events only by reason of the fact that he decreed that they take place, they vainly raise a quarrel over foreknowledge, when it is clear that all things take place rather by his determination and bidding.²⁶

I know the objections which many make here: when Paul says that those are predestinated whom God foreknew, he means that each is elected in view of his faith. But I cannot allow them this false supposition. God is not to be understood as foreseeing something in them which procures grace for them; rather they are foreknown because they were freely chosen. Hence Paul elsewhere teaches the same thing: God knows them that are His (II Tim. 2.9), because, that is, He holds them marked and as it were numbered in His roll.²⁷

...God elects those whom He elects in His gracious purpose, not those whom He foresaw would be obedient sons.²⁸

Calvin wanted to extinguish any idea of humanity's which might give us cause for boasting in our own merit or worth. Nor does God elect on the basis of God's foreknowledge of who would merit election. God's election is based on God's own decree. It is prior to everything, including creation, redemption and salvation. In Calvin's view, no one can ever merit election for we are all children of Adam and thus fallen. This is not to say that our actions are not important, but simply that neither they nor anything else we do can save us. In his commentary on 1Peter: 1, regarding the phrase "to the elect", he says:

At the same time, however, he reminds us of the source of that election, by which we are separated for salvation, so that we do not perish with the world, for he says, *according to the foreknowledge of God*. This, I say, is the fountain and the first cause. God knew before the world was created those whom He had elected for salvation.

We must consider carefully the nature of this foreknowledge. In order to obscure the grace of God the sophists imagine that the merits of each are foreseen by God, and that thus the reprobate are distinguished from the elect, as each one proves himself worthy of this or that fate; but everywhere Scripture sets the counsel of God, on which our salvation is founded, in opposition to our merits. Hence, when Peter calls them elect *according to the foreknowledge of God*, he is showing that the cause of it

depends simply on God alone, because He of His own free will has chosen us. Thus the foreknowledge of God excludes every worthiness on the part of man.²⁹

If, as Calvin states, election comes from nowhere else but the decision of God, it is unequivocally an election of grace. As we heard, "The fact that God...chooses one man but rejects another arises not out of regard to the man but solely from his mercy...."³⁰ Calvin's doctrine that it is God who elects and saves, and not we ourselves, is one of the fundamental tenets of Reformed Christianity, and bases election on God, who in turn, makes it an election of grace. It is indeed grace that God saves regardless of human thoughts, actions or feelings, or human worth or merit. Calvin was correct in stating that it is an election of grace. Election depends upon God and not humanity.

We have seen thus far that election is christological and that it is an election of grace, especially in so far as it is God's decision about a person and has nothing to do with a person's merit, good works or God's foreknowledge of their works. Another aspect, however, of Calvin's doctrine is beginning to be highlighted, and that is the basic understanding of election as God's decree. God decrees that some are elected and some are not.

3. THE DECREE

We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death.³¹

This is Calvin's explanation of God's eternal election. It is

God's eternal decree, or plan, which states that some are destined for salvation and the rest for damnation. It is a decree, not subject to argument or question, and is eternal in nature. In it, God's decree, God's will, is paramount.

For his will is, and rightly ought to be, the cause of all things that are....When, therefore, one asks why God has so done, we must reply: because he has willed it. But if you proceed further to ask why he so willed, you are seeking something greater and higher than God's will, which cannot be found.³²

Although he confesses that the decree is awful, nevertheless, it is prior to everything else.

The decree is dreadful indeed, I confess. Yet no one can deny that God foreknew what end man was to have before he created him, and consequently foreknew because he so ordained by his decree.³³

And it ought not to seem absurd for me to say that God not only foresaw the fall of the first man, and in him the ruin of his descendants, but also meted it out in accordance with his own decision. For as it pertains to his wisdom to foreknow everything that is to happen, so it pertains to his might to rule and control everything by his hand.³⁴

This we must believe: when he declares that he knows whom he has chosen, he denotes in the human genus a particular species, distinguished not by the quality of its virtues but by heavenly decree.³⁵

When speaking of Augustine, Calvin says:

Just as Augustine derives the beginning of election from the gratuitous volition of God, and grounds reprobation in His mere will, so he teaches that the security of our salvation is also grounded nowhere else.³⁶

A little later Augustine says: Those who by the most provident disposition of God are foreknown, predestined, called, justified and glorified, are the sons of God, not only before they were regenerated, but before they were born at all....³⁷

Through Barthian eyes, the question that is raised is whether or not this decree bears any relation to the Word of God in Jesus Christ.

the christological understanding of the doctrine. He put it quite succinctly in his positive use of Ambrose: "He [Ambrose] declares that the conversion of a man proceeds out of the gratuitous election of God; nor does he hide the fact that the reason why some are called and some are reprobated lies solely within His will."³⁸ It is a gracious decision of God and it is God's will alone which decides.

But what kind of election is it? What kind of election is it that Calvin sees as occurring "while yet we were not created" and "before the creation of the world"? To be sure, Calvin wants this election to include Christ. Christ, as we have seen, is the "mirror" of election and the "gate" into the kingdom. But does the election which happens before we were created also concern Christ? Calvin wants both an election which is God's eternal decree and Christ to be the mirror of it. What kind of election is that? It is an election which is an eternal decree occurring before the creation of the world which lies, in some sense, later to be defined, separate from Christ and puts up a mirror called Christ into which humanity is to look. God has both a hidden decree and an outward mirror. We shall see this more clearly as we continue.

4. THE REPROBATE

Calvin understood that election is a doctrine of grace. It is grace in that there is no amount of effort or good works, no divine foreknowledge of good works, that will save us. Election is purely and simply God's grace.

From our perspective, Calvin, however, understood predestination, God's eternal decree, to have two sides to it. He not only understood

it to be the doctrine which stated the foreordination to salvation, but also the foreordination to eternal death. This is God's eternal decree which has decided the end of each and every person.

Since the disposition of all things is in God's hand, since the decision of salvation or of death rests in his power, he so ordains by his plan and will that among men some are born destined for certain death from the womb....³⁹

Is this an election of grace? Surely it is grace for those preordained for eternal life, but for those headed for death it would be difficult to call it grace.

When explaining God's decree against the reprobate, Calvin quotes scripture. He uses scripture to produce levels or gradations of election; beginning with the dividing of the nations and the election of Abraham, then showing the election of Isaac and Jacob/Israel over Ishmael and Esau, and lastly placing the elect in Christ. These are degrees of election for Calvin, from the calling out of one nation to the election of individuals placed in the care of Christ. First, the divisions of the nations and the election of Abraham.

God has attested this [predestination] not only in individual persons but has given us an example of it in the whole offspring of Abraham, to make it clear that in his choice rests the future condition of each nation. 'When the Most High divided the nations, and separated the sons of Adam...the people of Israel were his portion,...the cord of his inheritance.' [Deut. 32:8-9] The separation is apparent to all men: in the person of Abraham, as in a dry tree trunk, one people is peculiarly chosen, while the others are rejected....⁴⁰

Second, the election of Isaac and Jacob/Israel over Ishmael and Esau:

We must now add a second, more limited degree of election,...that is, when from the same race of Abraham God rejected some but showed that he kept others among his sons by cherishing them in the church. Ishmael had at first obtained equal rank with his brother, Isaac, for in him the spiritual covenant had been equally sealed by the sign of circumcision. Ishmael is cut off; then Esau; afterward, a countless multitude, and well-nigh all Israel. In Isaac the

seed was called; the same calling continued in Jacob. God showed a similar example in rejecting Saul. This is also wonderfully proclaimed in the psalm: 'He rejected the tribe of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim but chose the tribe of Judah' [Ps. 78:67-68]. This is several times repeated in the Sacred History, the better to reveal in this change the marvelous secret of God's grace.⁴¹

Lastly, placing the elect in Christ:

Although it is now sufficiently clear that God by his secret plan freely chooses whom he pleases, rejecting others, still his free election has been only half explained until we come to individual persons, to whom God not only offers salvation but so assigns it that the certainty of its effect is not in suspense or doubt. These are reckoned among the unique offspring mentioned by Paul [cf. Rom. 9:7-8; Gal. 3:16ff]. The adoption was put in Abraham's hands. Nevertheless, because many of his descendants were cut off as rotten members, we must, in order that election may be effectual and truly enduring, ascend to the Head, in whom the Heavenly Father has gathered his elect together, and has joined them to himself by an indissoluble bond. So, indeed, God's generous favor, which he has denied to others, has been displayed in the adoption of the race of Abraham; yet in the members of Christ a far more excellent power of grace appears, for, engrafted to the Head, they are never cut off from salvation. Therefore Paul skillfully argues from the passage of Malachi that I have just cited [Mal. 1:2-3] that where God has made a covenant of eternal life and calls any people to himself, a special mode of election is employed for a party of them, so that he does not with indiscriminate grace effectually elect all [Rom. 9:13].⁴²

Such are Calvin's degrees of election. It must be remembered that Calvin places this doctrine after he has looked to Christ as Redeemer and discoursed on other aspects of the Christian life. He has not pulled this doctrine out of the air nor does his theology revolve around it. Nevertheless, it is a fact, and from his perspective, an inevitable one. He has looked around himself and seen what happens when the word of God is preached. He has noted that not all believe, not all hear the gospel as Good News.

In actual fact, the covenant of life is not preached equally among all men, and among those to whom it is preached, it does not gain the same acceptance either constantly or in equal degree. In this diversity the wonderful depth of

God's judgment is made known. For there is no doubt that this variety also serves the decision of God's eternal election.⁴³

The variety of response to the preaching of the Gospel is one clue to the prior decision of God to save some and reject the rest. This brings us to one of the two crucial questions put to Calvin which must be examined, namely, the relationship between the election which Calvin calls gracious and God's election of grace in Jesus Christ.

B. God alongside or apart from?

1. THE ELECTION OF GRACE AND THE GRACE OF CHRIST

Calvin speaks of our election being "in Christ" and of Christ being the "mirror" of our election. He says, "those whom God has adopted as his sons are said to have been chosen not in themselves but in his Christ....Christ, then, is the mirror wherein we must, and without self-deception may, contemplate our own election."⁴⁴

Calvin's doctrine of election is, to a great degree, christological, as we have seen, and in so far as he urges his readers to flee to Christ for the comfort of election.⁴⁵ Although Calvin may be christological, a Barthian asks what comes first in theological method, God's decree of election which Calvin calls gracious or God's election of grace in Jesus Christ?⁴⁶

Calvin says "...the salvation of believers has been founded upon the decision of divine election alone,"⁴⁷ "...the security of our salvation is also grounded nowhere else."⁴⁸ and "...by free adoption God makes those whom he wills to be his sons; the intrinsic cause of this is in himself...."⁴⁹ Even while maintaining the priority of Christ in grace he says, "In discussing Christ's merit, we do not

consider the beginning of merit to be in him, but we go back to God's ordinance, the first cause."⁵⁰ It is evident that Calvin makes a distinction between the decree of God which he calls the "first cause" and the revelation in Christ or adoption in Christ which comes later. There is a sequence of events which plays an important part for Calvin's doctrine.

...Christ insists upon this point alone: even though the desertions of vast multitudes shake the whole world, God's firm plan that election may never be shaken will be more stable than the very heavens. *The elect are said to have been the Father's before he gave them his only-begotten Son.* 'No one,' he [Christ] says, 'can come to me unless the Father...draws him....Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.'⁵¹

In his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, Calvin also makes bold statements.

He [Paul] tells them [the Ephesians]...that the full certainty of salvation consists in the fact that through the Gospel God reveals His love to us in Christ. But to confirm the matter more fully, he recalls them to the *first cause*, to the fountain, the eternal election of God, by which, before we are born, we are adopted as sons. And this so that they may know that they were saved, not by any accidental or unforeseen occurrence, but by the eternal and unchangeable decree of God.⁵²

When discussing the words, "Even as he chose us" (Eph. 1:4), he says:

Here he declares that *God's eternal election is the foundation and first cause* both of our calling and of all the benefits which we receive from God. If the reason is asked as to why God has called us to participation in the Gospel, why He daily bestows upon us so many blessings, why He opens to us the gate of heaven, we always have to return to this principle, that He chose us before the world was.⁵³

Not only is God's eternal election the first cause of election, but Calvin says that Christ is the second. "When he adds, *In Christ*, it is the *second* confirmation of the freedom of election. It is not from the sight of our deserving, but because our heavenly Father has

engrafted us, through the blessing of adoption, into the Body of Christ."⁵⁴ "Because they [those who come to Christ] were foreordained to life, they were given to Christ."⁵⁵

In one of the most revealing passages of the *Commentary on Ephesians*, this about "Who hath predestinated us" (Eph. 1:5), he says:

The reason why Paul pressed so earnestly on the Ephesians Christ and free adoption in Him, and *the eternal election which preceded it*, we have already mentioned. But as the mercy of God is nowhere declared more sublimely, this passage deserves our special attention. Three causes of our salvation are mentioned in this clause, and a fourth is shortly afterwards added. The efficient cause is the good pleasure of the will of God; the material cause is Christ; and the final cause is the praise of His grace.⁵⁶

And, on "according to the good pleasure of his will", he says, "His [the Lord's] single motive is the eternal good pleasure, by which He predestinated us."⁵⁷

He makes several remarks in *The Eternal Predestination of God* which correspond to this as well.

For thus we lay hold of life in Christ made manifest to faith, so that, led by the same faith, we can penetrate farther to see from what source this life proceeds. Confidence of salvation is founded upon Christ and rests on the promises of the gospel. Nor is it a negligible support when, believing in Christ, we hear that this is divinely given to us, that before the beginning of the world we were both ordained to faith and also elected to the inheritance of heavenly life.⁵⁸

Peter...puts on high above all causes the decree which God determined in himself.⁵⁹

It is becoming evident that while predestination is gracious in so far as those who are elected are so because of the grace of God, it is precisely the grace of God as differentiated from the grace of Christ. The election or decree of God which Calvin calls gracious precedes the grace of Christ. To be sure, Christ is involved in

election, but as the "second confirmation of...election", as the material cause, as something that occurs after the original decree of election. In response to Christ's words, "All that the Father giveth me shall come unto me; and him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37), he says:

Here we have three things briefly but clearly expressed: first, all that come to Christ were given to Him by the Father before; second, all who were given are transmitted from the Father's hand to His, so that they may be truly His; and lastly, He is a faithful custodian of all whom the Father entrusted to His good faith and protection, so that none is allowed to perish.⁵⁰

Those who come to Christ were sons of God in His heart when in themselves they were enemies of His. Because they were foreordained to life, they were given to Christ.⁵¹

Although Calvin is christological in the sense that he believes that election is "in Christ", from our point of view he does not understand that to mean the grace of Jesus Christ precedes election. Christ has become a "material cause".

The material cause, both of eternal election, and of the love which is now revealed, is *Christ*....⁵²

Christ has become one cause in the midst of causes, the highest or first cause being the eternal election of God. Christ retrieves those whom God has previously elected. "[W]e must, in order that election may be effectual and truly enduring, ascend to the Head, in whom the Heavenly Father has gathered his elect together...."⁵³ In describing what Paul meant in Eph. 1:11, Calvin says:

As if he [Paul] had said, 'The condition of all the godly is just the same as yours; for we whom God first called owe our acceptance by Him to His eternal election.' Thus he shows that, from first to last as they say, all have obtained salvation by mere grace, because they have been freely adopted according to eternal election.⁵⁴

And, "For God looks at nothing outside Himself by which He is moved to

elect us, for the counsel of His own will is the only and proper and...intrinsic cause of election."⁶⁵

It has been said that for Calvin, the ontic basis of salvation is in God's will, and the epistemic basis is the revelation in Christ.⁶⁶ This is true. Calvin indeed saw salvation as inherent within God's eternal decree or God's will. There it lies hidden. But he recognized that the way humanity views election can only be through the revelation in Christ.

Men preposterously ask how they can be certain of a salvation which lies in the hidden counsel of God. I have replied with the truth. Since the certainty of salvation is set forth to us in Christ, it is wrong and injurious to Christ to pass over this proffered fountain of life from which supplies are available, and to toil to draw life out of the hidden recesses of God.⁶⁷

Christ therefore is for us the bright mirror of the eternal and hidden election of God, and also the earnest and pledge.⁶⁸

But divine election is the origin and cause of our faith. But because God is invisible, and dwells in light inaccessible, admitting none to His counsel, except the only begotten Son who is eternally in His bosom, it is needful to hold the mind of Christ and to be illuminated by faith, in order that it may be clear to us what is the adoption that lies in the heart of God.⁶⁹

We see here that God begins with Himself when He sees fit to elect us; but He will have us begin with Christ so that we may know that we are reckoned among His peculiar people.⁷⁰

It is clear that Calvin saw Jesus Christ as the "earnest and pledge" of election, as the "mirror" of election. Yet he also believed that the decree of election was prior to God's work in Jesus Christ.

...election spoken of here cannot stand, unless we confess that God separated out from others certain men as seemed good to Him. It is this that is expressed by the word *predestinating*...Paul therefore refers to those only whom Christ condescends to call *after they have been given to Him by the Father*.⁷¹

Truly, inasmuch as he has enlightened us with the faith of the gospel by his Holy Spirit and made us partakers of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, even thereby...he has shown that he had elected us before the creation of the world. And therefore let us understand that to magnify God's grace aright, we must...come to this fountain and original cause, that is to say, to election.¹²

A Barthian perspective would say that Calvin thus presents a dichotomous understanding of God's will, for it presents humanity with two opposing analyses of it. On the one hand, from God's point of view, as it were, the eternal decree of election divides humanity into the saved and the damned. On the other hand, from the human point of view, the revelation of mercy in Christ is where humanity is to look, to strive for, and to count on. On the one hand, there is a decree. On the other, there is Christ. On the one hand, there is the eternal decree of election. On the other, there is the grace of Christ. This not only presents the problem of how one knows about the immanent Trinity without the economic Trinity, but also presents Christ as a *deus ex machina* who comes to the aid of humanity for comfort and for solace from the real God who really does divide the world into the saved and the damned. Christ becomes the half-truth to whom we are to look because the real truth is too difficult. To be sure, in scripture Christ sets himself up as the dividing point of humanity. For Calvin, this shows that God has already made the distinction between those God will give to Christ and those God rejects. In answer to the question, What comes first - the decree of God or the grace of Christ?, the answer is the decree of God. The grace of Christ is only a way out of the real dilemma of the eternal decree.

In explaining his doctrine of election, especially the reprobate, Calvin does not begin with the sole incarnation of God in this world -

- Jesus Christ. Instead, he begins with the separating out of Abraham and his descendants, then only those from Jacob/Israel, and then finally placing the elect in Christ's hands to protect them. Christ is not the beginning of election; only the protector of those already elected by God through this process of elimination.⁷³

This is a crucial point in the discussion of predestination, because we will arrive at quite a different understanding of the doctrine depending on where we begin and what/whom we see is the hub around which everything else revolves. Do we begin with the decision of eternal election and proceed to the ever narrowing of this election, or do we begin with Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, and view election outwardly from him? This is a fundamental question.

Reprobation highlights Calvin's fundamental problem. Although he understood that election, and indeed all theology, must be based on God and not humanity, for Barth he never clearly perceived that election, and indeed all theology, must be based on Jesus Christ.⁷⁴ In other words, he made the major break of the Reformation: he made theology begin with God and not humanity. But he did not finish the job: he did not make theology begin with Jesus Christ, crucified and risen.

The Word of God and reprobation accentuate this fact. Calvin bases reprobation on scripture and the ever narrowing of election, while basing salvation on God. Although Calvin considered reprobation to be one side of the coin of predestination and God's eternal decree, it was not.

Calvin understands Christ to be the mediator of salvation and the one "in whom" the elect are saved. For a Barthian, his christology

does not go deep enough for understanding the Christian faith. Instead of Christ being so fundamental to his understanding that Christ is both the elected and the one who elects, it is God who elects certain human beings and Christ is relegated to the position of middle-man. It is true that the elect are elected "in Christ" and that Christ is the "mediator" of election. There is a difference, however, between using Christ in order to get the people in whom God has already predestined, and Christ being THE predestined one; a difference between Christ being one of several causes of election and Christ being election; a difference between God predetermining who God would elect and sending Christ for them, and Christ embodying election.

While it may be that this is a subtle distinction, nevertheless, it is a crucial one. According to Calvin we look to Christ to see our election and for the comfort of our election. What is more fundamental is to come to Christ because his election incarnates election. There is a difference between, "Flee to Christ for comfort" and "Come to Christ because his election already is and remains your election."

To say that Christ is our election means that Christ is no longer a *deus ex machina*. To say that Christ is our election means our method of understanding and explication of the Christian faith and its doctrines must begin with Christ, crucified and risen. To say that Christ is our election means that the method of theology is, and begins with, the cross.

Christ is election, and by saying so we are necessarily saying that there is no decree, eternal or otherwise, that is prior to Christ's incarnation of election. Christ is the elect person; thus it can be truly said that we are elected "in him". In Christ's own

election we see our own. Christ is not sent for us, but is our election. Christ is "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," and as such we must acknowledge him as incarnated election. Christ defines election, not vice versa.

The distinctions we have made necessarily lead us to the other major question we have concerning Calvin's theology, one which Calvin sought to deny. Because of the fact that the Word of God means both Jesus Christ and scripture, and because there is a decree of election which precedes the grace of Christ, are there two wills in God?

2. THE SECRET PLAN

Throughout this chapter we have seen Calvin's understanding of election within the Word of God as both christological and derived from scripture. It is both the grace of Christ and the decree of God. Calvin, unknowingly, differentiated between the grace found in Jesus Christ and the prior decree of God.

Here, however, just as we saw, within Calvin's doctrine of providence, that his idea of God accommodating God's self to humanity pointed to a secret plan within God, so also do we locate a secret plan within his doctrine of predestination. In his response to Pighius, in *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, Calvin stresses that Pighius tries "to overthrow the secret counsel of God whereby He chooses some to salvation and destines others for eternal destruction."⁷⁵ On Romans 8:30 he says:

Here clearly the apostle speaks of a certain number, whom God destined as a property peculiar to Himself. For though God calls very many by other means, and especially by the external ministry of men, yet He justifies and finally glorifies none except those He ordains to life. The calling is therefore a certain and specific calling, which seals and ratifies the eternal election of God so as to make manifest

what was before hidden in God.⁷⁵

This is also seen in Calvin's remarks about the elect chosen before the foundation of the world. Numerous times in his sermon on Ephesians 1:3-4 Calvin mentions that "...God elected us before the creation of the world."⁷⁷ And, in his *Commentary on Galatians*, he says:

God had no doubt decreed before the foundation of the world what He would do with every one of us and had assigned to everyone by His secret counsel his part in life. But Scripture often speaks of these three steps: the eternal predestination of God; the destination from the womb; and the calling which is the effect and fulfilment of both.⁷⁸

This secret plan and the decree which we saw in Chapter 2 are the same here.

In this way, also, the other objection is solved, or rather vanishes by itself: if God not only uses the work of the ungodly, but also governs their plans and intentions, he is the author of all wickedness; and therefore men are undeservedly damned if they carry out what God has decreed because they obey his will.... We ought, indeed, to hold fast by this: while God accomplishes through the wicked what he has decreed by his secret judgment, they are not excusable, as if they had obeyed his precept which out of their own lust they deliberately break.⁷⁹

The decree is what determines all things. Calvin mentions it as far back as I.16.8. in the doctrine of providence:

[W]e make God the ruler and governor of all things, who in accordance with his wisdom has from the farthest limit of eternity decreed what he was going to do, and now by his might carries out what he has decreed. From this we declare that not only heaven and earth and the inanimate creatures, but also the plans and intentions of men, are so governed by his providence that they are borne by it straight to their appointed end.⁸⁰

Calvin had a secret decree in his predestination and it affects his theology. God's eternal decree is prior to all things: the creation of the world, all merit and worth, even the grace of God in

Jesus Christ. God, in his decree, has already made the decision about who is damned and who is saved, and it is a hidden decree.

We know also that Calvin asks us to flee to Christ for the knowledge of our salvation, for the comfort which keeps us from fear. The problem, from a Barthian perspective, is that despite Calvin's adamant claims to the contrary, there nevertheless remains two distinct wills, hidden and revealed, in God: 1) the hidden eternal decree, and 2) the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

In the first, God's will, God's decree, in fact, God's own self remains hidden. "...[W]e must always at last return to the sole decision of God's will, the cause of which is hidden in him,"³¹ "...that omnipotence of God...whereby he regulates all things according to his secret plan, which depends solely upon itself."³² God's decree which is seen in the various responses to the preaching of the gospel is primary, but the actual will of God remains hidden. It is secret.

In the second, God reveals God's self in Jesus Christ as the comfort of salvation, and we are told to flee to Christ for the knowledge of salvation. The revelation of God is primary.

In the first, there is a hidden will, an eternal decree, prior to all that exists, which has decided everything. In the second, there is a revealed will, a revelation of God, secondary in nature, which we are to run to despite the fact that everything has been decided. Surely this points to a major problem of Calvin's. How can God have two distinct and diverse wills? Which will has priority?³³

To be sure, Calvin opposed any notion of two wills in God. He makes this clear in his refutation of any distinction between God's

will and God's permission.⁶⁴ In the very last section of III. 24., however, Calvin makes a reference to what is being discussed here.

God is said to have ordained from eternity those whom he wills to embrace in love, and those upon whom he wills to vent his wrath. Yet he announces salvation to all men indiscriminately. I maintain that these statements agree perfectly with each other. For by so promising he merely means that his mercy is extended to all, provided they seek after it and implore it. But only those whom he has illumined do this. And he illumines those whom he has predestined to salvation. These latter possess the sure and unbroken truth of the promises, so that one cannot speak of any disagreement between God's eternal election and the testimony of his grace that he offers to believers.⁶⁵

On the one hand there is God's will from eternity which has made the eternal distinction between people, and on the other the salvation offered to everyone. Yet by his own words Calvin shows which he deems to have priority - "he illumines those whom he has predestined to salvation." In other words, predestination to love or to wrath is the fundamental and basic proposition which Calvin believes to have the utmost truth of God, and no matter how one views the mercy of God, it must always take second place. The hidden will determines the revealed will. "And the Incarnate God must weep as the Hidden God consigns a portion of mankind to perdition."⁶⁶

Calvin could also use his notion of God's accommodation to show his belief that knowledge of our election can only be found in Christ. Dowe puts this quite succinctly:

The doctrine of election is not a gnosis, but the reverse: it is knowledge of God gained from a revelation accommodated to our capacities, and it is to be meditated upon in this Revelation, which is Christ, and not speculated upon apart from him. The decree of God "precedes" the call in God's activities, but our view of it remains limited by the kind of knowledge we have of it, namely, the knowledge of faith in Christ.⁶⁷

Yet if all we have is God's accommodation, not the real and true God,

even if we look to Christ we may indeed still fear. What of this other will, this will which does not have the face of Christ on it? When God accommodates to our capacity, is God only showing us one side of a coin?

Calvin came upon his decision by virtue of his era as well. He had to maintain divine sovereignty and omnipotence in the face of the human sovereignty which he felt surrounded him, and because of the abuses of the Roman church and its ecclesiastical stranglehold on the totality of life.⁸⁸ Calvin pointed to God, and shouted "No!" to those who maintained any other authority than God. In so doing he maintained the supersedence of the hidden character of God over against the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Because he fought for the omnipotence of God against a human omnipotence, he maintained a hidden character of God to be the essential character of God, which necessarily meant that the revealed character of God was subordinate.

For Barth, Calvin's misconception was not to see that the omnipotence and salvation of God is to be found completely in Jesus Christ.

It is here that the difficulties arise. The all-determining willing God, the God who ordains and decrees all things from eternity, is the mysterious, incomprehensible God with whom we ostensibly have nothing to do. But since our election, and hence our salvation is determined by God's decree, it seems as though the God who is in principle unknowable is the one with whom we have everything to do. If this is true, what can we say for the lordship and universal redemption of Christ? How are we to understand the universality of Christ's redemption? Does the electing, inscrutable will of God override and, thus, undermine God's revelation in Christ?⁸⁹

So, which is true: the God of the eternal decree or the revelation in Christ? Even though Calvin considers it an anathema to

maintain that God has two wills, nevertheless, that is what comes out of his theology. Add to that the fact that they are diverse wills and one wonders just who God is.

Calvin's answer is that where there appears to be two wills is just that - "appearance".³⁰ We cannot see the unity although it is there.

It has been shown that Calvin thought the inscrutable will had priority by pointing to the fact that Calvin reminds us that Christ granted atonement to all.³¹ This goes directly against the divine decree of selectivity.³² Calvin can hold on to both by pointing to faith as the factor which makes God's promise effective. Yet even this is a gift of God and points back to God's decree.

Election precedes Christ's calling yet we must look to Christ to know of election. Our view of election is limited by Christ. Yet again, if our view of election is grounded in Christ, what of the decree? Is our simple appearance "an empty hope based upon a chilling illusion?"³³ It seems that "the salvation offered in Christ is not the salvation hidden in God."³⁴

Also, Calvin says that Christ offers redemption to all but only benefits the elect. It means "...Christ's work is a function of God's all encompassing decrees."³⁵ Calvin's "soteriology and Christology cannot be interpreted apart from the eternal decrees of predestination."³⁶

To this a Barthian would say that Jesus Christ is the one complete, total and true revelation of God, and it is to him that we must look to find our understanding of who God is and what God's omnipotence is like. We cannot look to partial or incomplete

revelations, but only to Christ. Jesus is who God always was.⁹⁷

Not only is the omnipotence of God to be found solely in Jesus Christ, but Christ is also God's will. That is, Christ is the one complete and clear picture of God's will for the world. This necessarily means that in Christ, God has shown the world exactly who God is, and that leads us to conclude that the revealed will of God is the only will of God. There are not two wills - a hidden and a revealed. There is only one will of God and that is Jesus Christ.⁹⁸

Calvin attempted to maintain both the divine sovereignty of God in the eternal decree which is hidden, and the revelation of God in Christ to whom we must flee for knowledge of our salvation. Yet it is evident that there are two different actions going on, and it is the opinion of this writer that Calvin maintained the sovereignty of God at all costs, including the cost of not seeing Christ as the eternal decree itself. He was christological, but not deep enough to understand and stand up to modern problems, as we shall see in the next section.⁹⁹ To be sure, he was facing a crisis of human vs. divine omnipotence, but nevertheless, he did not arrive at the further conclusion that Christ is the eternal decree. The essential nature of God is revealed in Christ. There is no hidden will of God before which we stand without Christ.¹⁰⁰

Because this revealed character of God is subordinate, it leads Calvin, despite his best instincts, to a determinism of the hidden will over the revealed will. Just as we had to discuss the question of human freedom in Chapter 2, so now we must address the problem of determinism in Calvin's theology under his doctrine of predestination.

3. DETERMINISM

The fact that Calvin's doctrine of predestination refers to God's prior decision which determines one's salvation or damnation can lead to the crucial question of determinism.¹⁰¹ In the face of God's sovereignty in providence and election, is this doctrine of God's decree deterministic?

According to Calvin, God is the one who decrees and orders everything. God

compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others.¹⁰²

As Scripture, then, clearly shows, we say that God once established by his eternal and unchangeable plan those whom he long before determined once for all to receive into salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, he would devote to destruction.¹⁰³

It must always be remembered that the world does not properly stand by any other power than of the Word of God, that secondary causes derive their power from Him, and that they have different effects as they are directed.¹⁰⁴

Before the first man was created, God in his eternal counsel had determined what he willed to be done with the whole human race.¹⁰⁵

Whether by "compacting with himself," his "eternal and unchangeable plan, the "will of God" or his "eternal counsel," it is clear that there is something hidden which lies beneath anything we can know about. There is something subterranean which makes the decision about our lives, something over which human beings have no control.

Not, indeed an omnipotence that is only a confused principle of confused motion, as if he were to command a river to flow through it once appointed channels, but one that is directed to individual and particular motions. For he is deemed omnipotent, not because he can indeed act, yet sometimes ceases and sits in idleness, or continues by a general

impulse that order of nature which he previously appointed; but, because, governing heaven and earth by his providence, he so regulates all things that nothing takes place without his deliberation.¹⁰⁵

While acknowledging this absolute hand of God over all things, including human action, Calvin also maintains the freedom of human beings. He has to do so to keep humanity morally responsible. (We discussed this earlier in chapter 2.) Calvin attempts to maintain both the omnipotence and sovereignty of God in all things while preserving human volition and responsibility. In I.17.3. he is adamant that God is omnipotent and "determines life and death," but also that human beings are to be held responsible for their actions. "All who will compose themselves...will not murmur against God on account of their adversities in time past, nor lay the blame for their own wickedness upon him..."¹⁰⁷

Calvin continually holds to both positions, the sovereignty of God and human freedom.

This means that we are not at all hindered by God's eternal decrees either from looking ahead for ourselves or from putting all our affairs in order, but always in submission to his will. The reason is obvious. For he who has set the limits to our life has at the same time entrusted to us its care....¹⁰⁸

Priority, of course, is given to God's sovereignty.

God, whenever he wills to make way for his providence, bends and turns men's wills even in external things; nor are they so free to choose that God's will does not rule over their freedom. Whether you will or not, daily experience compels you to realize that your mind is guided by God's prompting rather than by your own freedom to choose.¹⁰⁹

In I.17.9. Calvin attempts to use secondary causes.

Meanwhile, nevertheless, a godly man will not overlook the secondary causes. And indeed, he will not, just because he thinks those from whom he has received benefit are ministers of the divine goodness, pass them over, as if they had deserved no thanks for their human kindness; but from the

bottom of his heart will feel himself beholden to them, willingly confess his obligation, and earnestly try as best he can to render thanks and as occasion presents itself.¹¹⁰

But still, these secondary causes are nothing final.

Yet in taking counsel he will not follow his own opinion, but will entrust and submit himself to God's wisdom, to be directed by his leading to the right goal. But his confidence will not so rely upon outward supports as to repose with assurance in them if they are present, or, if they are lacking, to tremble as if left destitute. For he will always hold his mind fixed upon God's providence alone, and not let preoccupation with present matters draw him away from steadfast contemplation of it.¹¹¹

Calvin's doctrines of predestination and providence clearly make God the determiner of all things that happen. Human beings never move or breathe without God's all determining power nor without God's prior decision of God's will for them to do whatever they do. This is another one of the crucial areas where Calvin allows his humanist education to enter despite all his attempts to deny it. He can legitimately be accused of a kind of Stoic determinism. While demanding that human beings are responsible for their sinful actions and thoughts he never gives up the primary attitude that God's power is what determines everything. One would be hard pressed not to call Calvin a determinist.

Calvin consciously tries to hold both ideas together. When questioned concerning the feasibility of maintaining both of these at the same time, Calvin slams the door with the gruff remark, "We cannot know the hidden secrets of God."¹¹² We are not to ask concerning such high thoughts. These questions, the hidden vs. the revealed will and human freedom vs. divine omnipotence, leads a Barthian to perhaps the most important question: Who is Jesus Christ for Calvin?

4. WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

Calvin successfully negotiates for a return to a theocentric as over against an anthropocentric theology. From a Barthian perspective, however, Calvin does not go deep enough. In maintaining the proposition that God rules, not we ourselves, he has certainly crushed the human centred understanding of who God is and what God is up to in this world. But he does not go deep enough, he does not go to the one incarnation of God, the one revelation where God has come and lived among humankind. He does not see that in returning to a theocentric theology we must return to Christ, crucified and risen. He does not see that in returning to a theocentric theology, the God revealed there is the God alongside, not the God behind. For Calvin, God saves the elect and brings them home through Jesus Christ. He does not see that it is Jesus Christ who is election.¹¹³ We cannot view the fact that God holds us and our lives in God's hands, as it were, unless we see Christ himself in God's hands. If we want to see how God determines all things, we must look to Christ.

Christ shows us that God's determinism is indeed omnipotence, but an omnipotence re-defined.¹¹⁴ It is not an atomic, nuclear, "bust-your-face" kind of omnipotence. It is not a "we win" kind of power. It is not an "I am the greatest" kind of force. It is a crucified kind of omnipotence. It is a complete and total redefinition of what we human beings like to call power, and it is the power which says, "The first shall be last, and the last first."

God is indeed omnipotent. Calvin was correct insofar as he proclaimed that fact. But we must acknowledge that Christ defines it, not a prior decree without Christ.

Clearly, Calvin's doctrine of providence cannot stand up to the questions which the 20th century poses to Christianity. With the wars, pogroms and diseases of the past century, maintaining God's sovereignty as Calvin sees it places one in the position of being highly unrealistic about human life as it really is. The problem for Reformed Christianity is whether God's sovereignty must be denied in order to appease a realistic understanding of human life. Must God's sovereignty and omnipotence be denied in the face of so much "reality"? Perhaps not. Perhaps God's sovereignty, power, providence and predestination mean something different. Perhaps God's sovereignty, power, providence and predestination are defined exclusively by Jesus Christ. It is to this that we now turn.

ENDNOTES -- CHAPTER 3

¹This is, of course, according to the 1559 *Institutes*. In the previous editions, providence and predestination were lumped together. Important as this may be, we have chosen to look only at the 1559 edition and not to go into further scrutiny on the question of the development of the doctrines. To do so is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Muller adds: "The solidification of this placement of doctrine in 1559 and the similarity of placement in the catechism of 1537 and the *Confessio Gallicana* may be seen as a centralization of predestination in a physical sense so that, like the doctrines of God and providence in Book I and the doctrine of Christ in Book II of the *Institutes*, it can provide an explanation in terms of the divine sovereignty and grace for all that precedes and follows it." (*Christ and the Decree*, The Labyrinth Press, Durham, N.C., 1986, p. 23.)

"Predestination was Calvin's most emphatic way of saying that salvation is the work of God's grace..." (John Leith, *Introduction to the Reformed Tradition*, John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1978, p. 102.) This is true. It is only to be regretted that Calvin did not begin his *Institutes* with God's gracious election as seen in Jesus Christ, for his doctrine of providence would have changed as well.

²W. Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, trans. H. Knight, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press), 1956. Niesel takes this position. He argues for Calvin by using the same arguments Calvin does. He says that God has chosen whom he wills "in Christ," and that "Christ is the Author of our election." (164) The interesting corollary with Calvin is that Niesel, too, points to the human experience that it appears that some are saved and some are not. This means that the ones whom God does save are saved "in Christ." We will see, throughout this chapter, the arguments against this.

B.G. Armstrong, in his book, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, states, "In the *Instituto* Calvin discussed this doctrine only when he had completed his exposition of all the soteriological doctrines. While a simple relocation of the doctrine of predestination may not at first sight seem momentous, it in fact is. It makes the most profound difference whether one approaches theology via predestination or simply discusses the doctrine as an implicate from grace." (40) (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press), 1969.

³A.E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1990, p. 163.

Muller adds: When Calvin wrote of providence and predestination, he did not adopt the scholastic determination of predestination as a special category of providence. Both in his 1539 edition of the *Institutes* and in the treatise, *De aeterna praedestinatione dei* (1552), Calvin set providence below predestination in his order of discussion, implying that the work of providence lies under and serves predestination. Predestination occupies much the same position in Book III of the *Institutes* (1559) that providence occupies in Book I. Even as providence represents the power of God maintaining and nourishing the world so does predestination show forth God's gracious

will in calling and preserving the body of the church. But the salvation of man is the great purpose of the entirety of God's work: 'God has destined all things for our good and salvation.' Predestination attains a logical priority over providence since predestination more than providence tends toward this end.

The result of this particular implication for the systematic relationship of predestination to providence -- and perhaps to all other doctrine -- is to create a tension within the structure of the *Institutes* itself. The traditional relation of the doctrines seems to be denied as well as omitted, leaving room for a variety of formulations in the thought of Calvin's followers....If predestination does indeed become determinative of providence in the logic of Calvin's system, might not the positions of predestination and providence be reversed?" (pp. 23-4)

While this tension is indeed true, it is evident that with the structure of the 1559 *Institutes*, Calvin chose to place providence within the doctrine of God and predestination within the experience of human life as a Christian. For that reason it would be difficult to explain predestination to be the central theme of Calvin's thought.

⁴Referring to our human works with regard to salvation, Niesel shows the differentiation, that Calvin thought "our salvation...lieth in the Word of God and in Christ." (p. 74) Here we see again, that although the Word of God and Christ are intimately related, they are not the same. Niesel himself did not point out the importance of this difference. (W. Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, Lutterworth Press, London, 1956)

⁵III.24.5. and J. Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, trans. T.H.L. Parker, in *Calvin's Commentaries*, eds. D.W. Torrance and T.F. Torrance, (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd), 1965, cf. chapter 1. (Hereafter known as *Galatians*.)

"The whole gist of this chapter [III.24.] is that divine election is to be viewed exclusively in terms of our own salvation, which exists solely 'in Christ'." (Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*, Columbia Univ. Press. New York, 1952, p. 187)

"Built into Calvin's system is an interrelation and interpenetration of predestination and Christology...." (Muller, *Op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁶Modern scholarship has questioned the precedence given to predestination in Calvin's theology by the later Calvinists. Cf. J.K.S. Reid, "The Office of Christ in Predestination", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 1. 1948, pp. 12-19, 166-173; Niesel, Chapter 12; E.A. Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*, (New York: Columbia University Press), 1952, *passim*, to name but a few.

⁷III.24.5.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹III.22.7.

¹⁰III. 24. 5.

¹¹John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, Trans. J.K.S. Reid, James Clarke & Co., Cambridge, 1961, p. 133.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹⁴III. 21. 5.

¹⁵III. 22. 2.

¹⁶III. 22. 1.

¹⁷III. 22. 2.

¹⁸III. 22. 5.

¹⁹III. 23. 10.

²⁰III. 22. 4.

²¹*The Eternal Predestination of God*, p. 55.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 69.

²³*Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 70.

²⁵III. 22. 1.

²⁶III. 23. 6.

²⁷*The Eternal Predestination of God*, pp. 70-1.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 81.

²⁹Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and the First and Second Epistles of St. Peter*, Eds. D.W. Torrance and T.F. Torrance, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh, 1963, pp. 229-30. Hereafter known as *Hebrews*.

³⁰III. 23. 10.

³¹III. 21. 5.

³²III. 23. 2.

³³III. 23. 7.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵III.22.7.

³⁶*The Eternal Predestination of God*, p. 65.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 66.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 63.

³⁹III.23.6.

⁴⁰III.21.5.; Calvin also uses Deut. 4:37; 7:6-8; 10:14-15; 23:5; 1 Sam. 12:22; Ps. 33:12; 47:4; 105:6,42; Is. 14:1; 41:9; Amos 3:2; Zech. 2:12.

⁴¹III.21.6.; Calvin also uses Mal. 1:2-3; Rom. 9:13.

⁴²III.21.7.; Calvin also uses Rom 9:27; 11:15; Is. 10:22-3; Ga. 4:28.

⁴³III.21.1.

⁴⁴III.24.5.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

⁴⁶"Calvin avoids undue speculation but also discusses predestination in terms of his distinction between God's truth and the accommodated nature of revealed truth and the distinction between the eternal decree and its execution in time. We know of election in Christ, since he provides, as the incarnate mediator, the middle term, the resolution of the distinction, by which the decree is effected in the elect. Christology and predestination can no longer be viewed in isolation one from the other." Muller, *Op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁴⁷III.22.5.

⁴⁸*The Eternal Predestination of God*, p. 65.

⁴⁹III.22.7.

⁵⁰II.17.1.; "Christology and predestination are bound intimately together. The necessity of Christ's mediation, says Calvin, was not an 'absolute necessity' but 'stemmed from a heavenly decree on which man's salvation depended': the person of the mediator is necessary to our salvation, but the sending of the mediator rests entirely on the sovereign freedom of God in his grace." Muller, *Op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁵¹III.22.7., emphasis added.

⁵²John Calvin, *Galatians*, p. 124, emphasis added.

⁵³*Ibid.*, pp. 124-5, emphasis added.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. 125, emphasis added.

⁵⁵*The Eternal Predestination of God*, p. 96

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 126, emphasis added. Reid adds: "The cause *movens* of the eternal determination of God, Calvin found to be the interest of the self-glorification of God; and thus for Calvin Christ becomes in the last resort only a *causa instrumentalis*, an organ through which God realises His eternal determination." *Op. cit.*, pp. 172-3.

⁵⁷*Galatians...*, p. 127.

⁵⁸*The Eternal Predestination of God*, pp. 56-7.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁶²*Galatians...*, p. 127. Wendel believes that although in appearance redemption is the "means or instrument chosen from eternity," that it had to go along with predestination. (F. Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of his Religious Thought*, Collins, 1963, p. p. 231.) We will see this more closely in a later section.

⁶³III.21.7.

⁶⁴*Galatians.*, p. 130.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*

⁶⁶C. Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought, vol. xiv, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1977, p. 87.

Muller says: "[T]he objective and ontic grounding of doctrine in a generally Scotist perception of God pressed Calvin, on the one hand, toward a far more powerful emphasis on the divine self-revelation in Scripture as the ultimate ground of doctrine than had been contemplated in the late medieval theology, and on the other hand, toward a powerful emphasis on the subjective and noetic resolution of the problem of transcendence in Christ and in the believer's perception of Christ as the ground of the godly life." *Op. cit.*, pp. 21-2.

⁶⁷*The Eternal Predestination of God*, p. 126.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

⁷¹*The Eternal Predestination of God*, pp. 68-9, emphasis added.

⁷²Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, The Banner of Truth Trust, London, 1973, p. 30.

⁷³R. S. Wallace, in his book, *Calvin, Geneva and the Reformation*, says this: "It [predestination] provided the answer he found through Christ and the Scriptures to some of the most pressing questions which arose during his life and ministry. Why did he find himself given a place among the elect people of God within the Church, on the side of justice instead of unrighteousness, with his mind inclined to truth instead of error, with his heart concerned for the glory and kingdom of God? Why did the gospel not find the same reception among those to whom it was preached? Why was it that where some were being amazingly converted, others remained indifferent and some were hardened into a more determined opposition to the truth and to the ways of God?..." (pp. 270-1)

Wallace goes on to say that Calvin answered all these questions and more by saying, "'Can any reason be asserted why God should not call all alike, except that in his sovereign election he distinguishes some from the others?'" (quoting Calvin's *Commentary on Psalms* 64:5). Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva and the Reformation*, Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh, 1988.

⁷⁴The reason for this "must" will be discussed more fully in the Barth section.

⁷⁵John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, Trans. J. K. S. Reid, James Clarke & Co., Cambridge, 1961, p. 53.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, p. 70, emphasis added.

⁷⁷*Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 30, pp. 22-34.

⁷⁸John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, trans. T. H. L. Parker. *Calvin's Commentaries*, eds. D. W. Torrance and T. F. Torrance, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh, 1965, p. 20.

⁷⁹I. 18. 4.

⁸⁰I. 16. 8.

⁸¹III. 23. 4.

⁸²III. 23. 7.

⁸³Reid, *Op. cit.*, says: "The weakness is evident in a chance phrase which Calvin is at least once betrayed into using (III.22.1.): '*gratiam istam Dei praecedat electio*': thus, election precedes grace. If this is true, then one's worst forebodings are fulfilled. The God and Father of Jesus Christ is a God of grace. Who, then, is this God who determines men's election before grace becomes operative?" ("Office of Christ", p. 12.)

Muller shows that there are two elements: "the predestinarian structure (the decree and its execution) and the christological

structure (the Son and his manifestation in the flesh) together provide a basis for the parallel development and mutual interpenetration of the doctrines of predestination and the person of Christ." (p. 38) There is the decree of God and there is the second person of the Trinity -- Christ. While it is true that Calvin is christological, he did not carry this to its logical conclusion. "Christ stands, as mediator, between God and man but also between the decree and its execution and must somehow be subordinate to the decree...." (36) "As mediator Christ is subordinate to the decree while as Son of God he is one with the Father and in no way subordinate. The Son as God stands behind the decree while the Son as mediator is the executor of the decree." (37-8)

Muller does not believe that Christ and the decree are separable. (38) He states that Reid was right that "Calvin never sought to develop this more speculative side of his doctrine, never meditated in detail upon the trinitarian ground of theology as the point at which the lines of christological and predestinarian doctrine converge." (38)

⁸⁴III. 23. 8.

⁸⁵III. 24. 17.

⁸⁶B. A. Gerrish, "'To the Unknown God': Luther and Calvin on the Hiddenness of God", *The Journal of Religion*, 53, 1973, pp. 273-4. In this article Gerrish is referring to Luther but later says it applies to Calvin as well.

⁸⁷E. A. Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*, Columbia Univ. Press, New York and London, 1952, p. 188.

⁸⁸"...[W]e find...the emphasis characteristic of the Reformation: the impotence of humanity and the omnipotence of God." A. E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1988, p. 91.

⁸⁹C. J. Kinlaw, "Determinism and the Hiddenness of God in Calvin's Theology", (*Religious Studies*, 24.4., pp. 497-509), p. 505. Kinlaw discusses the question of the priority in Calvin of the inscrutable will as over against the revealed will in Christ. He begins with what he calls Calvin's "dual epistemological context" (498), i.e., we reflect on God to see our own imperfection and reflect on ourselves to see the "infinite moral perfection of God." (498) This leads us to assert that God is the source of all things, which leads Calvin to say that there is a "causal dependency between every discreet event in the created order and God's all-determining will." (499) Nothing happens that God does not make happen. Kinlaw says that Calvin's "emphasis of divine causation [is] theologically clothed as special providence." (500)

The result is that human agency is lost. "Agents which are receptacles or instruments, whose destiny is to live out the temporal sequence of divine directives, are no agents at all." (502) Yet Calvin wants to maintain some sort of human agency simply to make sure that the human being is kept morally responsible, but he never gives up the priority of God as the source of all things. When, Kinlaw claims,

Calvin seeks to make grace the cause, even grace becomes "omni-competent," (504) and this omni-competence of grace is what finally ensnares Calvin - he drives a wedge between "God's Word or the content of revelation and God's essence or inscrutable will which remains, in principle, unknowable." (504)

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 506.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, p. 507.

⁹²*Ibid.*

⁹³*Ibid.*

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 508.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 509.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*

⁹⁷J.K.S. Reid, in his article, "The Office of Christ in Predestination", enters into the debate concerning the place of Christ both in Calvin's theology and the later Calvinists, while also offering constructive ideas for change.

He shows that there have been at least 8 different understandings of the words "in Christ", and the part Christ plays in election. It is unfortunate that throughout history, the ones most used have been the ones that made Christ a passive element in election, and points out that when Calvin himself used the term "in Christ," his priorities were to defeat election according to human merit, not to explain what Christ had to do with election. Reid's point is that Christ never really receives the correct role, but simply carries out the divine decree.

In his "Prolegomena to Restatement" he makes several suggestions. 1) We should abandon Calvin's words found in 3.22.1., "*gratiam praedecit electio* (election precedes grace), and recognize that Christ must perform the crucial office in election, especially as he is the true revelation of God and is part of the Godhead himself. 2) We should seek to discontinue the word "decree" as God's will is a living and gracious one, whereas decree is something fixed and static. It makes God's will into fate. 3) After taking out the word "decree", we see that "Predestination is wholly personal." (177) Since election is in Christ, we know that election is a personal, relational concept, not a fixed decree. 4) The cross elicits a response - "the obverse of the fact that God wills to do with us is that we have to do with Him." (178) God in Christ calls us to a decision, yet even as it is given we recognize it as an "echo of the reply already given in Christ." (179)

Reid closes his article with his idea of the office of Christ in predestination, and reminds us that both aspects of Eph. 1:4 must be heard. "We are chosen in Christ; and we are chosen before the foundation of the world." (179) Christ does not simply serve an instrumental function but really is God, really is with God. Christ is both the Chosen and the Chooser.

In reprobation we must always hear the cry of dereliction from the cross. It is that which points to Christ being the reprobate on our behalf. Reid says that the Reformers set up a parallel between election and reprobation, but that this was wrong. They said God was the basis for election and reprobation, but the sinner was responsible for his/her own punishment. Instead, Reid says that the parallelism is that we see both salvation and reprobation "in Christ". "Christ is the Chosen; therefore we are chosen. And Christ is the Reprobate; therefore we are not reprobate." (181)

Reid ends by stating that always we must come up against the problem of evil. This he says must be left unexplained.

99 "If Christ really is the revelation of God, then God is a God of grace, a God, that is, who in all His ways and works is gracious. This thought must be pressed to almost all limits. It is true that the *Deus revelatus* is still and for ever remains the *Deus absconditus* (Is. 45. 15). His very revelation is itself also a concealment. Who would think to find the sovereign God at work in a Nazareth carpenter's shop? But that God remains 'hidden' must not be construed to mean that there is something or some part in God to which Christ is not the clue.

There is, then, nothing in God which is not gracious. God's *consilium* is not exempt from this principle. It is not a counsel which is carried out in or by grace; it is a counsel that is itself gracious. Nor is there in God any will which is superior or anterior to grace. God's will is a gracious will. God's will is not put into execution by grace, but is itself grace." Reid, pp. 173-4.

99 I realize I have not answered the question, "enough for what?", but this will be the burden of part 2.

100 "Predestination is simply grace traced, if we may so put it, to its earliest source, and found to be already deposited safely within an eternal decision. Predestination connotes that the grounds for a man's being right with God are at the last to be found with God and *in se uno*, where the door is barred to all extraneous intruders. Grace connotes that these *divinae sapientiae adyta* contain nothing which the light of revelation has not illumined, and that in them we shall never have the surprise of meeting what is un-Christlike." Reid, p. 175.

101 Partee, in his article, "Calvin and Determinism" (*Christian Scholar's Review*, 5, 1975, pp. 123-8), says that Calvin's doctrine of predestination and providence are not deterministic. He claims they are different from the Stoic doctrine of fate because of Calvin's use of experience. "I would like to suggest that Calvin's view of predestination differs sharply from the Stoic doctrine of necessity because Calvin's is finally based on an appeal to experience rather than to reason." (p. 124.)

Calvin saw the world and its problems with clarity. He was not blind to the evils which beset the world he lived in. He saw the human response to the preached word and he was honest about its acceptance. He never expected a total acceptance. If anything, he understood human nature so well that he was extremely sceptical about

much acceptance at all. He did, however, use his own human experience of the variety of human responses to the Gospel as a clue to the prior decision of God to save some and reject the rest. He used his experience as one basis to understand the divine decree. "In actual fact, the covenant of life is not preached equally among all men, and among those to whom it is preached, it does not gain the same acceptance constantly or in equal degree." [III.21.1.] "[E]xperience shows that of the great multitude many fall away and disappear, so that only a slight portion remains." [III.21.7.]

For since we notice that the examples that the Lord shows us both of his clemency and of his severity are inchoate and incomplete, doubtless we must consider this to presage even greater things, the manifestation and full exhibition of which are deferred to another life. On the other hand -- since we see the pious laden with afflictions by the impious, stricken with unjust acts, overwhelmed with slanders, wounded with abuses and reproaches; while the wicked on the contrary flourish, are prosperous, obtain repose with dignity and that without punishment -- we must straightway conclude that there will be another life in which iniquity is to have its punishment, and righteousness to be given its reward. [I.5.10.]

Calvin's experience that human beings respond differently to the Gospel prompted him to the belief that God had ordained it that way. If one takes into account God as Creator and Redeemer, as well as faith, regeneration, the Christian life and justification, and then sees the world's refusal to believe in this gospel, what other conclusion could one come to? Surely God has an eternal decree which has divided the world into those who will believe and those who will not. Surely this is all in the plan God has ordained for the world. "If all men in general bowed the knee before Christ, election would be general; now in the fewness of believers a manifest diversity appears. [III.22.7.]

Partee is correct in stating that Calvin used his experience to understand predestination. "Calvin was not interested in speculation about God-in-himself but God in his relationship to us as revealed in his Word. Thus Calvin's continuing influence depends not simply upon the coherence of his theological reasoning, but also upon the cogency of his description of the Christian *experience* of God. ("Calvin and Experience", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 26, 1973, p. 171.

"Calvin also appeals in his doctrine of faith, Scripture, and in the Holy Spirit to *experience*. In this sense experience is the arena of human life in which events occur which properly interpreted show that man deals with God in everything. Calvin not only argues this point, he assumes it as well. This conception of dealing with God in everything is a basic attitude of Calvin's which is more than a rational conclusion. It is a deeply-held conviction which explains in large measure the conclusions Calvin draws about God's providence and predestination." ("Calvin and Experience", p. 178)

But Calvin failed to see the really Christian understanding. He correctly saw the problem, in so far as he understood that salvation is not based on anything human. It depends solely on God. But in his reconstruction of the Christian faith he did not see that it is

through Jesus Christ that we must view salvation and predestination. We cannot make judgments based upon our experience of some who hear and believe and some who do not. Experience tells us only what happens in this world, and although we must take that seriously, we cannot base theology on it. We must base theology on Jesus Christ, crucified and risen.

¹⁰²III.21.5., emphasis added.

¹⁰³III.21.7., emphasis added.

¹⁰⁴Calvin, *Hebrews*, pp. 362., emphasis added.

¹⁰⁵Calvin, "Articles Concerning Predestination", *Calvin: Theological Treatises, Library of Christian Classics*, Trans. J.K.S. Reid,, SCM Press, London, p. 179., emphasis added.

¹⁰⁶I. 16. 3.

¹⁰⁷I. 17. 3.

¹⁰⁸I. 17. 4.

¹⁰⁹II. 4. 7.

¹¹⁰I. 17. 9.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*

¹¹²"Calvin wants to contend that Christ epistemically offers redemption to all, while that redemption benefits only the elect. This means that the ontological and metaphysical truth is that the inscrutable God is sovereign in all soteriological matters. Christ as redeemer is subordinate to the hidden Father in the sense that Calvin means Christ's work is a function of God's all-encompassing decrees." Kinlaw, p. 509.

¹¹³D.C. Steinmetz, in his article "Calvin and the absolute power of God" (*Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 18.1., pp. 65-79), argues that Calvin refuses to make the scholastic distinction between the absolute and ordained power of God because it separates God's justice from his power and "transforms the compassionate Father of the biblical narratives into an arbitrary tyrant." (p. 65) It speculates about God rather than knowing God through revelation. "While Calvin is only too eager to recommend the boundless power of God as a comfort for believers, he does not want the godly to contemplate that power except through the spectacles of Scripture. To investigate the will of God apart from the revealed will of God in the Bible is to lose oneself in a labyrinth of vain speculations." (p. 77)

For Calvin, God's power cannot be separated from God's justice, and all this must be seen through scripture. Scripture is the guiding principle. We must ask which part of scripture? Which aspect is the guiding hand from scripture which is found there and which we may use constantly and consistently?

We must also ask about these concepts of power and justice which cannot be separated. Who defines them? If scripture, what aspect of scripture? Steinmetz answers by saying that for Calvin, "even the impenetrable darkness outside revelation cannot rob the godly of their confidence that the hidden power of God is not the power of an arbitrary tyrant, but the infinite power of a just Father." (p. 78) Surely this is Calvin's proclamation that even power must be seen from the point of view of a fatherly God, a God who cares as a father does. But why does he not carry this to its most logical and crucial conclusion? It is a fatherly God because God is the Father of Jesus Christ. It is Jesus Christ who thus shows us the Father, what fatherhood means, and what power and justice mean. There can be no concepts of father, power or justice. Only Christ can define them.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD THE REVEALER

How do we explain and/or proclaim God in the 20th century? With the enormous changes in human life since the 16th century, with the ever present problems of the 20th century, and with the added questions posed by Langdon Gilkey, can Reformed theology still speak to humanity about the providence of God? Can Calvin be reformed? How can Reformed Christians be true both to Calvin and to the Reformed insistence on "always reforming" in their explication of God, providence and predestination?

Among the significant theologians of the 20th century, Karl Barth stands as one of the most prolific Reformed theologians and one who must be encountered, whether agreeing or not in the final analysis in one's theological position. While I find it difficult, if not impossible, to concur with T.F. Torrance's position that Barth is next in the theological, historical queue of Athanasias and Calvin, we do a disservice to ourselves if we do not take seriously Barth's analysis of the Christian faith and dogmatics. While there is no use for Barthian scholasticism, we must take Barth seriously.

Barth offers us a 20th century, Reformed explication of Christian doctrine, albeit with a distinctive mark: he so re-interprets revelation as to process everything through the one revelation of God in Jesus Christ. While every Christian theologian demands a certain christocentrism, we have seen that for certain aspects of Christian doctrine, Christ is not necessarily personally involved. Even in

Calvin's christocentrism he was able to view providence without it proceeding through Christ.

Karl Barth's explanation of the Christian faith and dogmatics, however, is radically centred on Jesus Christ. For Barth, Jesus Christ is the centre around which every other doctrine revolves. Christ defines how we do theology and through him we read scripture.

[T]his means that the unfolding and presentation of the content of the Word of God must take place fundamentally in such a way that the Word of God is understood as the centre and foundation of dogmatics and of Church proclamation, like a circle whose periphery forms the starting-point for a limited number of lines which in dogmatics are to be drawn to a certain distance in all directions.²

It will become increasingly evident that this distinction has serious consequences.³

According to Barth, theology begins with the doctrine of the Trinity rather than a discussion of how human beings gain knowledge of God. The doctrine of election is placed within the doctrine of God and eternally centred on Jesus Christ rather than placed in soteriology and made hidden. Providence is the outward manifestation of the eternal election of grace and points to God's eternal participation in our life alongside us, rather than a secret directiveness which decides what will happen in our lives and which we know about only through scripture. If Calvin reformed the church by making theology theocentric, Barth reformed Calvin by making theology christocentric, by centring our knowledge of God and all of theology around the one man, Jesus Christ.

This chapter will attempt a brief explanation of Barth's doctrine of God. To do so, he begins with the doctrine of the Trinity in order to set the doctrine of God in clearer focus. As we shall see, this

was itself a significant reform of dogmatics. In succeeding chapters we will look at election and providence, centred on Jesus Christ.

A. The Triune God

Barth's doctrine of God is not one common to other religions and theologies. That is, Barth does not begin his dogmatics by explaining the existence, or giving a general description, of God which gradually narrows and becomes identified with the God of scripture.⁴ He begins, instead, with the doctrine of the Word of God, with the Trinity, and with his understanding of revelation. He knew this was different from nearly every other theologian, outside Lombard and Bonaventura.⁵ Even Calvin said, "Let us then willingly leave to God the knowledge of himself....But we shall be 'leaving it to him' if we conceive him to be as he reveals himself to us, without inquiring about him elsewhere than from his Word."⁶ As we shall see, the problem is that Calvin's understanding of the Word of God is wider than Barth's, and thus Barth felt that "Calvin himself might be quoted against the procedure adopted by him."⁷ Placing the doctrine of the Trinity together with revelation was vital for Barth.

What we are trying to bring to practical recognition by putting it first is something which has not been concealed in the history of dogmatics and which has often enough been stated very strongly, namely, that this is the point where the basic decision is made whether what is in every respect the very important term "God" is used in Church proclamation in a manner appropriate to the object which is also its norm. The doctrine of the Trinity is what basically distinguishes the Christian doctrine of God as Christian, and therefore what already distinguishes the Christian concept of revelation as Christian, in contrast to all other possible doctrines of God or concepts of revelation.⁸

Before we encounter his doctrine of God, then, let us take a brief look at his understanding of revelation, which will then lead us to

his own particular doctrine of God.⁹

Theology does not begin with the question, "Does God reveal God's self or not?" According to Barth, "God reveals God's self" is simply fact. We cannot go back before this statement because the Bible only gives us the fact of God's revelation. Theology begins with that fact.¹⁰

There are three forms of the Word of God -- preached, written and revealed. Although the written form, scripture, and proclamation reveal God, they are based on the Word of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Word of God. In Christ we see God, and he is the one in whom God chooses to reveal God's self.¹¹ Although scripture and proclamation witness to God's revelation, they are not the Word of God as Christ is the Word of God. They witness to Christ but they are not the incarnate Word of God.¹²

Certainly the Bible has been used to attempt to prove the fact that God reveals God's self, but this is not Barth's understanding of scripture. Scripture is not a proof nor an authority which we can point to independent of its content. Scripture, for Barth, is a witness to the authority, not the authority itself. "Why and in what respect does the biblical witness have authority? Because and in the fact that he claims no authority for himself, that his witness amounts to letting that other itself be its own authority."¹³

Revelation happens. Revelation happens, not as a faculty of the human mind which perceives that a god exists and then narrows into the Christian God, but in and through Jesus Christ.

All revelation, then, must be thought of as revealing, i.e., as conditioned by the act of revelation. The event in which revelation occurs must be seen in connexion with what has happened once and for all in this act. All fulfilled time

must be seen as filled with the fulness of this time. Revelation itself, however, is not referred to anything other, higher, or earlier. Revelation as such is not relative. Revelation in fact does not differ from the person of Jesus Christ nor from the reconciliation accomplished in Him. To say revelation is to say "The Word became flesh."¹⁴

Jesus Christ is the unveiling of the God who cannot be unveiled. "Revelation, *revelatio*, ἀποκάλυψις, means the unveiling of what is veiled."¹⁵ "The revelation attested in the Bible is the revelation of the God who by nature cannot be unveiled to men."¹⁶

"Veiling" and "unveiling" are two key concepts in Barth's idea of revelation. God is veiled and, while unveiling God's self in Jesus Christ, God remains veiled. The mystery is that veiling and unveiling happen together, and that as they happen God reveals God's self to us truly, not in part. If God unveiled God's self completely to us, without the veil, we would die. We would see God face to face.¹⁷ Instead, God reveals God's self which is different from unveiling. God reveals God's self in relationship. God reveals God's true and complete self in the veil of relationship, and this is mystery.

In the speaking and receiving of God's Word what is involved is not just an act of God generally, and not just an act of God in creaturely reality as such, but an act of God in the reality which contradicts God, which conceals Him, and in which His revelation is not just His act but His miraculous act, the tearing of an untearably thick veil, i.e., His mystery.¹⁸

"Revelation means the incarnation of the Word of God."¹⁹ When God unveils God's self in the veiling of God's self in Jesus Christ, God's own self is incarnate in the midst of humankind, and this is a mystery. Human beings cannot grasp the fact that God is present on earth, and thus God reveals God's self by being in relationship with humanity. The fact that God is incarnate in Jesus Christ, the fact

that the divine is "Emmanuel", is a mystery. The fact of relationship with human beings, that God's self is in relationship with people, is also mystery. In this mystery God gives of God's self while maintaining God's freedom and identity.²⁰

Revelation, thus, is something different than uncovering. Revelation is the veiling in the unveiling, or unveiling in the veiling. Revelation maintains the hiddenness while uncovering. Revelation offers us relationship -- different than merely uncovering God's self.

The hiddenness does not have to do with a will of God behind the God revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Hiddenness is not something we can know about God without God's revelation. Hiddenness is not an "attribute" of God which we can discern apart from revelation. We cannot begin with it. We cannot begin with "the impossibility of knowing God."²¹ The hiddenness is not different from the unveiled, only that were we to see it in its complete and total unveiling, we would die. So God reveals -- God veils God's self in God's unveiling.²²

Revelation, then, is not a complete exposing of God. Revelation is in relationship. Revelation is the giving of God's self to humankind by being in relationship with us. It is, and remains, a mystery.²³

Yet God chooses to reveal God's self and the revelation we hear through scripture is not one revelation among many. It is utterly unique.

The basic problem with which Scripture faces us in respect of revelation is that the revelation attested in it refuses to be understood as any sort of revelation alongside which there are or may be others. It insists absolutely on being

understood in its uniqueness.²⁴

Scripture demands that revelation be "understood in terms of its object, God."²⁵ That is, revelation must be understood the way God chooses, not the way humanity chooses. God comes to us, not we go to God. God reveals God's self, the Word of God, and in so doing we must understand revelation the way God chooses to be known. This means that while we may objectify God as an aspect of our knowledge, it is God who allows God's self to be objectified. God is the one who seeks and grasps us and who thus allows us to have knowledge of God.²⁶ We ask, therefore, who is this God who reveals himself, and a second and third question must go with it: "How does it come about, how is it actual, that this God reveals Himself?" and "What is the result?"²⁷

These three questions must be taken together, and thus to ask after this God means

*God reveals Himself. He reveals Himself through Himself. He reveals Himself. If we really want to understand revelation in terms of its subject, i.e., God, then the first thing we have to realise is that this subject, God, the Revealer, is identical with its effect.*²⁸

Thus, to ask after the revelation of God is to ask after the triune God. This is also taken from Barth's insistence on theology being defined by its object, i.e., human beings cannot define theology, only God can.

Theological thought, like all orderly human thought, receives its basic forms from its object. It is by its object that it is first and foremost awakened and rendered possible: by it, it is claimed, employed, and requisitioned; by it, given form and order and stamped as theological thought.... Its object is the reality on which the Christian Church is founded, the reality which forms the content of its life and the substance of its message. Its object is the man Jesus Christ present here to-day, as He was yesterday, through the Holy Spirit in the witness of the Old and New Testaments. It is God Himself in His truth, that is in His revelation -- the God who reveals and judges man's

sin, takes it upon Himself and forgives it, the God who gives man the hope of eternal life and in doing so takes man into His service. Such is the object by which theological thought has been awakened and rendered possible, the stamp of which it must bear in all circumstances.²⁹

To take up the question of revelation in the Christian sense, therefore, is to take up the question of the Trinity. This is one of Barth's fundamental reforms, that there is no ontologically hidden God which is not revealed economically in the son. It has been suggested that Barth has recovered the Athanasian and Nicene-Chalcedonian emphasis that Father and Son are one, as is the Holy Spirit with them both.³⁰ The early church insisted on the *homoousion* of the Son with the Father, thus stressing the fact that who the Son is, so the Father is. There is no space in this dissertation to discuss whether or not this is either Athanasian or Nicean-Chalcedonian, whether or not dualism is inherent in the Latin language and fathers, nor whether or not Barth is the greatest theologian in the queue with Athanasias and Calvin.³¹ What is important, however, is its place in Christian theology as a whole, and Barth's theology in particular. "If we really want to understand revelation in terms of its subject, i.e., God, then the first thing we have to realise is that this subject, God, the Revealer, is identical with His act in revelation and also identical with its effect."³²

A church dogmatics must, of course, be christologically determined as a whole and in all its parts, as surely as the revealed Word of God, attested by Holy Scripture and proclaimed by the Church, is its one and only criterion, and as surely as this revealed Word is identical with Jesus Christ.³³

For Barth, the identification of the external works of God with the internal Trinity is crucial. Not to do so would make revelation a

revelation of a god, but not the God we know in scripture, whose revelation is a fact. If God did not communicate who God is really and essentially, then we can never be sure about anything about this God, never be sure whether God is for us or against us. It could be said that Calvin was far more humble than Barth with regard to his statements about the internal Trinity, but also that he did not fully see the implications of his own Christological understanding of the Christian faith. Barth has taken what he understands about revelation and explicated it in his doctrine of the Trinity, and therefore sees Jesus Christ as the "one, unique in kind"³⁴ revelation of God. His *Church Dogmatics* will be the working out of this Christological basis.

This has been called "a rather reductionist identification of God with the activity of God that is known to us, a collapsing of God into his revelation...."³⁵ It simply cannot be said that Barth's "identification of God with the revelation of God"³⁶ means a "reduction"³⁷ of God. This is to refuse to see the "unique in kind" character of the revelation of God, as well as the mystery of God, as revealed in Jesus Christ. This is to negate the New Testament as the New Testament, the Testament which sheds light on and thus illumines the Old Testament. It is to maintain an understanding of the various Christian doctrines as separate entities from each other, rather than seeing that one's understanding of revelation necessarily impacts one's entire theology.³⁸ If only a part of God is revealed *ad extra*, then we have no assurance with this God. If God is truly revealed in Jesus Christ, then we must work out our theology in accordance with it.

God Himself speaks when this man speaks in human speech.
God Himself acts and suffers when this man acts and suffers

as a man. God Himself triumphs when this One triumphs as a man. 39

Again, Barth affirms the hiddenness of God, the mystery, the veiling of God as God unveils God's self, "the hiddenness of the Word, and therewith the sole reality of indirect knowledge..., and therewith the immanent Trinity, the eternal essence and the eternal counsels of God." 40 This affirmation cannot be made tritely, for to do so would simply dissolve into an *analogia entis* and then a natural theology. No, the hiddenness of the Word is categorically affirmed. But if this true indirectness and hiddenness is taken seriously, then we must say "God for us" in order to say "God in himself."

It is the *Deus revelatus* who is the *Deus absconditus*, the God to whom there is no path nor bridge, concerning whom we could not say nor have to say a single word if He did not of His own initiative meet us as the *Deus revelatus*. Only when we have grasped this as the meaning of the Bible do we see the full range of its statement that God reveals Himself, i.e., that He has assumed form for our sake. 41

This being of the triune God is event. Revelation is event. God is not static or defined philosophically as unmoved. God's triune nature is event, happening. The second and third questions show God as essentially revealing and thus essentially event. "God happens as revelation...." 42

The problem of the Trinity has met us in the question put to the Bible about revelation. When we ask: Who is the self-revealing God? the Bible answers in such a way that we have to reflect on the triunity of God. The two other questions: What does this God do and what does He effect? are also answered primarily, as we have seen, by new answers to the first question: Who is He? The problem of the three answers to these questions -- answers which are like and yet different, different and yet like -- is the problem of the doctrine of the Trinity. In the first instance the problem of revelation stands or falls with this problem. 43

When we say, then, that the doctrine of the Trinity is the interpretation of revelation or that revelation is the basis of the doctrine of the Trinity, we find revelation itself

attested in Holy Scripture in such a way that in relation to this witness our understanding of revelation, or of the God who reveals Himself, must be the doctrine of the Trinity.⁴⁴

God reveals God's self. God's revelation is who God is. God does not reveal God's self as anyone other than who God is. The answer to the second and third questions must be the same as the answer to the first or we will be trying to get behind God to some other nature of God. This cannot happen because "God reveals Himself as the Lord."⁴⁵ God is none other than the one who can reveal God's self as Lord.

The God who reveals Himself here can reveal Himself. The very fact of revelation tells us that it is proper to Him to distinguish Himself from Himself, i. e., to be God in Himself and in concealment, and yet at the same time to be God a second time in a very different way, namely, in manifestation, i. e., in the form of something He Himself is not. ⁴⁶

If God's revelation of God's self is who God is, then there is no God behind God, no will of God which is not revealed in God's revelation. This not only says no to the ancient heresy of modalism, but, more importantly for our purposes, it rejects all notions of a hidden will, either in predestination or providence. There is no other will of God except the one revealed because God reveals God's self as who he is, "God reveals Himself as Lord." God has not revealed God's self as one thing while holding back God's self. God's being is in God's act, and we see this in God's revelation. "The subject of revelation is the subject that remains indissolubly subject. One cannot get behind this subject. It cannot become object."⁴⁷ "The indissolubility of His being as subject is guaranteed by the knowledge of the ultimate reality of the three modes of being

in the essence of God above and behind which there is nothing higher."⁴⁸

To the unity of Father, Son and Spirit among themselves corresponds their unity *ad extra*. God's essence and work are not twofold but one. God's work is His essence in its relation to the reality which is distinct from Him and which is to be created or is created by Him. The work of God is the essence of God as the essence of Him who is revealer, revelation and being revealed, or Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer.⁴⁹

B. God in Act

"God is."⁵⁰ This is the statement which Barth seeks to elucidate in his doctrine of God. As we have previously seen, this cannot and will not be done by offering a set of general propositions or a general idea. We cannot speak of the doctrine of God apart from God's trinitarian revelation in Christ.

We are not concerned with any idea of the divine under which we will subsume the only true God with other gods. We are well aware that, if we do this, we shall be enquiring in fact not about the idea of God, but, in common with the worshippers of those other gods, about the idea of man, about the sum of his wishes and longings, about the highest embodiment, in absolute form, of our own being.⁵¹

So, too, the doctrine of God takes up the question of the being of God, but it is not "being" in some general way or a static concept.

In connexion with the being of God that is here in question, we are not concerned with a concept of being that is common, neutral and free to choose, but with one which is from the first filled out in a quite definite way. And this concretion cannot take place arbitrarily, but only from the Word of God, as it has already occurred and has been given to us in the Word of God. This means that we cannot discern the being of God in any other way than by looking where God Himself gives us Himself to see, and therefore by looking at His works, at this relation and attitude -- in the confidence that in these His works we do not have to do with any others, but with His works and therefore with God Himself, with His being as God.⁵²

"God is who He is in His works."⁵³ This is not to say that God is

bound by God's works, but that "yet in Himself He is not another than He is in His works."⁵⁴

Positively, God's being cannot be separated from God's revelation. God's act and being go together.⁵⁵ God's revelation is seen in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Thus the being of God must be encountered this way.

In all the considerations that are brought before us in this chapter we must keep vigorously aloof from this tradition, remembering that a Church dogmatics derives from a doctrine of the Trinity, and therefore that there is no possibility of reckoning with the being of any other God, or with any other being of God, than that of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as it is in God's revelation and in eternity.⁵⁶

This revelation is the answer which is given by God. We cannot know God apart from God's revelation.⁵⁷

The very first "declaration" of God's being is to say that "in God's revelation...we have in fact to do with His act."⁵⁸ Specifically this act in God's revelation is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. "What is concerned is always the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, always His justification of faith, always His lordship in the Church, always His coming again, and therefore Himself as our hope."⁵⁹ And with this we say that "in this very event God is who He is."⁶⁰ God is active and moving. God is not a static principle.

We are dealing with the being of God: but with regard to the being of God, the word 'event' or 'act' is *final*, and cannot be surpassed or compromised. To its very deepest depths God's Godhead consists in the fact that it is an event -- not any event, not events in general, but the event of His action, in which we have a share in God's revelation.⁶¹

But none of these definitions of who God is can be used generally. It is not that God is act in general, but a particular act. "...God is

in Himself free event, free act and free life."⁵² But this free event, act and life is made particular in scripture, in the specific ways and persons with and in whom God deals with the world. "*Actus purus* is not sufficient a a description of God. To it there must be added at least '*et singularis*.'"⁵³

That God is event, act and life and that God is all these in particularity means that God is a specific "I" addressing a specific "Thou". God is "person".

The particularity of the divine event, act and life is the particularity of the being of a person. We speak of an action, of a deed, when we speak of the being of God as a happening. Indeed the peak of all happening in revelation, according to Holy Scripture, consists in the fact that God speaks as an I, and is heard by the thou who is addressed.⁵⁴

God is person. But God is not one person among many or even the highest person. We cannot look to our concept of person and say that God is the best of who we are. No. God defines person.

We cannot speak of "personalising" in reference to God's being, but only in reference to ours. The real person is not man but God. It is not God who is a person by extension, but we. God exists in His act. God is His own decision. God lives from and by Himself.⁵⁵

What is meant is certainly not personified being, but the being that in the reality of its person realises and unites in itself the fulness of all being...It is genuinely...always an "I." It is the I who knows about Himself, who Himself wills, Himself disposes and distinguishes, and in this very act of His omnipotence is wholly self-sufficient.⁵⁶

Barth continues this definition with the words "self-moved"⁵⁷ and "self-motivated."⁵⁸ And again, these definitions cannot be derived from ourselves, from positing ourselves in a larger or better way.

Whatever may be the truth about this movement of ours, if we do not want to be guilty of comparing ourselves with God (and this is precisely what is forbidden and prohibited in God's revelation) we cannot understand this motivated and motivating being of ours as a self-motivated and self-

motivating being. It is not only to unmoved nature and unmoved spirit, but to our motivated and motivating being that God's being stands in contradistinction, as the one and only being that is self-motivated.⁶⁹

It is God who defines God's self, not human beings. It is God who possesses God's own authority. God is God's own being in act in God's self.

God's revelation draws its authority and evidence from the fact that it is founded on itself apart from all human foundations. God's commandment, God's grace and God's promise have a unique force because they are without reference to human strength or weakness. God's work is triumphant because it is not bound to our work, but precedes and follows it in its own way, which may also be the way of our work. God's righteous demand on man, and His faithfulness in covenant with him, are irresistible and irrevocable because for their confirmation they need only God Himself and no corresponding relation of man....The fact that God's being is event, the event of God's act, necessarily means that it is His own conscious, willed and executed decision.⁷⁰

God is *actus purus* but also *et singularis*. Everything to be said about God must conform to this, and now Barth seeks to do just that. But for Barth this does not mean either that we are seeking a hidden essence which is, in fact, inscrutable, or the revealed part of God which we are allowed to know but which hides who God really is.

"God is God." This very tautology as such we find clarified and explained in God's revelation. For it is nothing less than God's self-revelation. It is the revelation of the name by which He wills to be known and addressed by us, the name which does not add a second and extrinsic truth to the first intrinsic truth of His intimate, hidden essence, but which is the name and the criterion and the truth of His innermost hidden essence. This essence of God which is seen in His revealed name is His being and therefore His act as Father, Son and Holy Spirit....The fact that we cannot go behind His livingness for a definition of His being means in fact that we cannot go behind this name of His, because in the very revelation of His name there occurs the act which is His being to all eternity.⁷¹

C. *The Being of God as the One who Loves*

The first aspect of this revelation of God is "that God is He who, without having to do so, seeks and creates fellowship between Himself and us."⁷² Revelation tells us that although God does not need God's creation to be God, God nevertheless seeks and creates fellowship with us, that God wishes to be in relationship with us. This is an "overflow of His essence,"⁷³ for God, as we have seen, has relationship within God's self. "God's being is thus *self-related* being. As being it is structured as a relationship."⁷⁴ But God "wills to be ours, and He wills that we should be His."⁷⁵ This is the being of the one who loves.

He does not exist in solitude but in fellowship. Therefore what He seeks and creates between Himself and us is in fact nothing else but what He wills and completes and therefore is in Himself. It therefore follows that as He receives us through His Son into His fellowship with Himself, this is the one necessity, salvation, and blessing for us, than which there is no greater blessing -- no greater, because God has nothing higher than this to give, namely Himself; because in giving us Himself, He has given us every blessing. We recognise and appreciate this blessing when we describe God's being more specifically in the statement that His is the One who loves. That He is God -- the Godhead of God -- consists in the fact that He loves, and it is the expression of His loving that He seeks and creates fellowship with us. It is correct and important in this connexion to say emphatically His *loving*, i.e., His act as that of the One who loves.⁷⁶

This love is found specifically in Jesus Christ. "The love of God, or God as love, is therefore interpreted in 1 John 4 as the completed act of divine loving in sending Jesus Christ."⁷⁷ It is the particular act that we see in Jesus Christ that tells us who God is. It can never be defined apart from Jesus Christ. It is no general concept. Jesus Christ explains and proclaims to us what love means.

Intentionally we have not begun with a definition of love, but with the resolve to let the act of God visible in His

revelation speak for itself -- God is in His act the One who seeks and creates fellowship with us. If we define this action of His as the love of God, and therefore God as the One who loves, and (in the proper sense) as love, our gaze must always be directed strictly on the fact, i.e., on God's act, and must not be allowed to wander under the influence of a concomitant and supposititious general idea of love. If we say with IJohn 4 that God is love, the converse that love is God is forbidden until it is mediated and clarified from God's being and therefore from God's act what the love is which can and must be legitimately identified with God.⁷⁹

God seeks and creates fellowship with us and in so doing re-defines for us what love means.

First, "God's loving is concerned with a seeking and creation of fellowship for its own sake."⁷⁹ It is not that other descriptions of God come first or define God's loving. The word "good" cannot be used to explain God's love.

God is good in the fact that He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that as such He is our Creator, Mediator and Redeemer, and that as such He takes us up into His fellowship, i.e., the fellowship which He has and is in Himself, and beyond which as such there is no greater *Good* which has still to be communicated to us through His fellowship with us. Loving us, God does not give us something, but Himself; and giving us Himself, giving us His only Son, He gives us everything.⁸⁰

He reiterates: "If we look for God's good behind His love in a *summum bonum* that is separate from His love, in the act of determining this *summum bonum* we can hardly avoid a relapse into the concept of a pure unmoved being, and will have to defend it in face of the divine witness of revelation."⁸¹ So, too, it can be added, we cannot look for anything about God behind him without coming up against the concept of a pure unmoved being. The love which, though seen throughout scripture,⁸² is found in 1 John 4:8f is decisive for who God is, this God who defines love and who seeks fellowship.

Second, God's love is not determined by our response. There is

nothing we can do to merit or obtain it. If that were so, it would be prior to God's love and would make us, once again, active determinants in meriting what is, by nature, God's grace to give. It would muddle the divine and human. "In reality the basis of the love of God lies outside the man loved by Him and in God Himself."³³

The object of the love of God as such is another which in itself is not, or is not yet, worthy of this His pleasure. The love of God always throws a bridge over a crevasse. It is always the light shining out of darkness. In His revelation it seeks and creates fellowship where there is no fellowship and no capacity for it, where the situation concerns a being which is quite different from God, a creature and therefore alien, a sinful creature and therefore hostile. It is this alien and hostile other that God loves. Fellowship with him as such is the fellowship which He seeks and creates. This does not mean that we can call the love of God a blind love. But what He sees when He loves is that which is altogether distinct from Himself, and as such lost in itself, and without Him abandoned to death. That He throws a bridge out from Himself to this abandoned one, that He is light in the darkness, is the miracle of the almighty love of God.³⁴

Third, "God's loving is an end in itself."³⁵ It is who God is. It needs no other.

But God loves because He loves; because this act is His being, His essence and His nature. He loves without and before realising these purposes. He loves to eternity. Even in realising them, He loves because He loves. And the point of this realisation is not grounded in itself, but in His love as such, in the love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.³⁶

Fourth, "God's loving is necessary, for it is the being, the essence and the nature of God. But for this very reason it is also free from every necessity in respect of its object."³⁷ It is God's very nature to love. Loving is who God is. But it is within the nature of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to love and is not dependent on any object outside God's self. The fact that God loves outside God's self, that God loves humankind, is pure grace.

While he could be everything only for Himself (and His life would not on that account be pointless, motionless and unmotivated, nor would it be any less majestic or any less the life of love), He wills -- and this is for us the ever-wonderful twofold dynamic of His love -- to have it not only for Himself, but also for us....If He loves us, if He has preferred our being to our not-being, our lovableness to our unlovableness, that is for us the ever-wonderful dynamic of His love. It is grace and not nature.⁸⁸

This four-fold explanation of God's love points, for Barth, to the fact that it is not love which defines God but God who defines love. There is no common concept of love which humanity can know, define and understand and to which God must conform. No. God defines love. In God's triune essence, God is love. God's act is God's love. "'God is' means 'God loves'. Whatever else we may have to understand and acknowledge in relation to the divine being, it will always have to be a definition of this being of His as the One who loves."⁸⁹ And although God had no need to be in fellowship outside of God's self, God has chosen to be in relationship with God's creatures. God chooses to love us.

But God's act is His loving. It is His blessedness in so far as it is His essence even apart from us. But He wills to have this same essence, not merely for Himself alone, but also, having it for Himself, in fellowship with us. He does not need us and yet He finds no enjoyment in His self-enjoyment. He does not suffer any want and yet He turns to us in the overflow of the perfection of His essence and therefore of His loving, and shares with us, in and with His love, its blessedness. This blessedness of the love of God is founded on the fact that He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit and as such loves us: as our Creator, Mediator and Redeemer, as love itself, the One who loves eternally. It is as well to make all this clear because it reminds us of the mystery of the divine love which transcends all thought, of its divinity which is different from all other love and eternally surpasses all other love, and of the fact that as we have to do with God's being in God's revelation, we have to do with the one true love to which all other love can only bear witness, not of itself, not by an indwelling power of witness, but only because our creaturely loving is confronted in God's revelation with this one true love, and that we, who love as creatures, are claimed in God's

revelation as the objects of this divine, this one, true loving.⁹⁰

Barth returns to his previous proclamation of God as person, in light of the fact that God is act, and seeks to show how it corresponds to the fact that God is love. He reminds us that God defines person, that God is "the person."⁹¹ This means that human beings can only be persons when they love as God loves.

Therefore to be a person means really and fundamentally to be what God is, to be, that is, the One who loves in God's way. Not we but God is I. For He alone is the One who loves without any other good, without any other ground, without any other aim, without any other blessedness than what He has in Himself, and who as He does so is Himself and as such can confront another, a Thou. Without being limited or bound by this other, He can be this other's limit and bound, the very ground of his being, and in such a way that He can meet this other on his side as a Thou, and can be understood and addressed by this other as Thou. He is therefore capable of fellowship -- capable of fellowship on the basis of His own power and act, capable of fellowship and capable of achieving fellowship in Himself and without the need of this other, but at the same time capable of fellowship and capable of achieving fellowship with reference to this other. This means really and fundamentally to be I. The being and therefore the loving of God has alone this character of being I.⁹²

God defines person and love. In light of the fact that God is act, God is the true person who exists in love. It is God alone who is act, person and love, and this is unique and particular.

Thus to know, to will, and to act like God as the One who loves in Himself and in His relationship to His creation means (in confirmation of His I-ness) to be a person. God is a person in this way, and He alone is a person in this way. He is the real person and not merely the ideal. He is not the personified but the personifying person -- the person on the basis of whose prior existence alone we can speak (hypothetically) of other persons different from Him. When He meets us in His revelation as the One who loves, He meets us as the One who is unique.⁹³

God meets us this way in the particular man, Jesus Christ. "This one man is therefore the being of God making itself known to us as the

One who loves."⁹⁴ Here Barth makes a critical rebuttal to all who, while using our human, anthropomorphic language, would say that although we use this language we know that it only accommodates to our human and fallible minds. What is really behind all this anthropomorphic language is "the impersonal absolute, the highest good, the world-spirit or world-cause or the like."⁹⁵ To this Barth says no. God reveals God's self to humanity as who God is truly. This does not take away the fact that we are human beings and cannot comprehend the mystery of the divine, but it does say that there is no hidden God behind the God we know as God reveals God's self to us.

The fact that in knowing God we cannot comprehend Him because we know Him only as men and not as He knows Himself, has nothing whatever to do with a proviso of this kind (according to which the esoteric claims finally to know Him as He know Himself). If we know God only in a human way, even in this limit we know Him on the basis of His revelation as the One He is. He is the One who loves, surpassing all our concepts and ideas of love, but still the One who truly loves, and therefore One - person. As One, as person, He surpasses all our concepts and ideas of person, but still He reveals what one, a person, really and truly is. We are therefore allowed and commanded within the limits of what is human to speak the truth when we speak of Him as the One, as personal; the truth, beyond which there is no greater, because in the mystery of His ways which we cannot unravel, God is none other than the One as whom He has made Himself manifest and comprehensible to us in His revelation.⁹⁶

The corollary says to us that in our human understanding of God we are not confronted by a paradox of God as personal and God as "impersonal absolute." This is not the divine paradox. The true paradox is that while God reveals God's self to us, God remains a mystery. While revealing the true nature of God to humanity, nevertheless God remains a mystery. Mystery is the divine revealed in worldliness, the divine revealed in the veiling of the ordinary, the

manger and also the cross. This is mystery, the true paradox. The mystery is that God is in that manger and on that cross. The mystery that the divine becomes human, that it happened. How can that be?! We do not know, but we must proclaim it. The true paradox is that while we are sinners, God reveals God's self to us.

[T]he (to us) inexplicable paradox of the nature of God is the fact that He is primarily and properly all that our terms seek to mean, and yet of themselves cannot mean, that He has revealed Himself to us in His original and proper being, thus remaining incomprehensible to us even in His revelation, yet allowing and commanding us to put our concepts into the service of knowledge of Him, blessing our obedience, being truly known by us within our limits. It is the paradox of the combination of His grace and our lost condition, not the paradox of the combination of two for us logically irreconcilable concepts. Recognising the true, divine paradox, we shall not see together or put together God's personal-ness and God's absolute-ness in the way that we are often forced to do, with and without logical contradictions, when we describe created realities, but we shall hold to the fact that God has revealed Himself to us as He who He is, that is, as the One who loves and therefore as One -- person.⁸⁷

There is no hidden God behind the God we know in God's revelation to us in Jesus Christ. There are no decrees which lay hidden and to which we may not gain access. There is no hidden will of God which we can never know. God's revelation is not God's accommodation to our human understanding. God reveals God's self to humankind in Jesus Christ, and in Jesus Christ God is no other than who God is. On this we can count.

Barth goes into an excursus on the question and history of whether God is person. While 17th and 18th century orthodoxy stressed impersonal terms for God, "the nature of God was defined as a neuter furnished with every conceivable superlative", ⁸⁸ Enlightenment philosophy maintained that God was absolute spirit and the superlative of whatever was best of humanity. As such God was not "person."

If God is in reality only the highest idea, or the origin of all theoretical and practical aesthetic ideas, or "the spirit," if we know Him as we know this spirit, and in it the source of all rationality, and in this the absolute or the highest good of men, it is very hard to see why and how He can and may be One, why and how He can and may be person. What a person is, was now thought to be known from the knowledge of self as person. Person is the individual manifestation of the spirit, its individualisation, which as such is limited, but contingently necessary. How, then, could God be a person? The esoteric or explicit meaning of this question was: How could God be limited? How does the infinity of the spirit tally with the finiteness that is prescribed for it with the concept of personality?

According to Barth, the underlying problem was that humanity was the subject and God became the object or predicate. God became whatever humanity thought God should be. Humanity defined person and humanity defined God. Humanity was the source and foundation from which all thought about God sprang. Humanity had control.

[This point of view] was irresistibly powerful because it moved in purely analytical statements, because it merely repeated the so-to-speak commonly held presupposition that man is the person who, thinking the idea of his reason, has the power to think God, and that for this reason, and in confirmation of it, God is to be thought of as absolute and infinite, but cannot under any circumstances be thought of as person and therefore as the superior rival of man. On the premisses of the Enlightenment, Romanticism and Idealism this opposition to the personality of God cannot be avoided, because it is absolutely vital. If we begin with this equation, willingly and wittingly or not we have already contested the fact that God is a person, and we cannot later recant. For with this equation we have attributed true and proper personality to man as the subject of the idea of reason, thus taking the step which necessarily brings us into insoluble contradiction with belief in the personal God.¹⁰⁰

The serious undermining of this Enlightenment view of God, according to Barth, was done by Feuerbach. He perceived that their understanding of God was a glorification of themselves, and he said so. Barth quotes Feuerbach:

Because for the Christian the spirit, the feeling, thinking, willing being, is his highest being and his ideal, he makes

it also his first being, i.e., he changes his spirit into an objective, existing outside him, and different from him....Is the eternal spirit not just the spirit of man desiring to be eternal, complete?...Does not man wish to be free from the confines of the flesh? does he not wish to be omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent? Therefore is not this god, is not this spirit, the realised desire of man to be eternal spirit? Have we not, therefore, objectivised even in this god the nature of man?...Is, therefore, their god, their eternal spirit, anything other than the image and pattern of what they themselves want to become, the original and copy of their own nature as it is to be unfolded in the future?...The eternal spirit is nothing but the generic concept of the spirit which is symbolised as an independent being by the power of imagination at the command of human wishes and human impulses towards happiness.¹⁰¹

This "exploded" the myth that God is the object of which humanity is the subject, as well as those who both sought to maintain it along with an equal assumption that God is personal. To them all Barth felt that Feuerbach had revealed their underlying presumption, maintaining themselves as subject and God as object. The God of scripture calls that idolatry.

The question of whether God is personal is finally not the important question. The important point to be made is that "God is the One who loves"¹⁰² and on this everything depends. Thus, even God as personal depends on this prior fact and must conform to it. It cannot stand alone.

In preaching nothing is to be gained by this concept, and nothing lost. The only thing which matters is that God's Word should be proclaimed as the Word of the One, the One who loves; as the Word of which He Himself as such is the Subject and content; and not as an expression of our own eternity and therefore not as the word of a general, neutral truth or goodness. What will then be proclaimed is not that God is person, but the particular person He is.¹⁰³

D. The Being of God in Freedom

Barth answers the question, "Who is God?" in yet one more way. He wishes to emphasise the uniqueness of God. It is the uniqueness of God's act and loving that makes it God's act and loving and no one else's. It is God's uniqueness that emphasises the character of all God's characteristics, which means we must stand back and let God define act and love, and in this case, freedom. It is a question of the depth of God. "His act is in a unique way His act. His love is uniquely His love. He is uniquely who He is."¹⁰⁴

This object permits and indeed commands us to speak of a life and love, of a living and loving I, defining, attesting and proclaiming it. But permitting and commanding us to do so, He also requires us to understand and name Him beyond all our insights and ideas as the I who lives and loves in His unique way, to give Him the honour which cannot even remotely accrue to any but the living and loving being known to us, but which we must specifically deny to all other living and loving beings known to us, because it is properly and originally His honour alone, because we can truly understand all other life, love and being only in virtue of His creation and therefore as the reflection and echo of His life and love. Only when we glimpse the depth in which He lives and loves and has His being, have we truly recognised and understood His being as love and therefore as divine.¹⁰⁵

This question of the depth of the divine being is not, however, a question looking for some aspect of God which has been hidden and lies behind what has been revealed. No. Again we must not stray from the knowledge given in Jesus Christ, from the depth shown to us in Jesus Christ.

We make our enquiry on the assumption that the object of this universal idea of God, i.e., of any idea of God formed otherwise than in view of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, is necessarily other than He who is Lord and salvation, and therefore the object of the faith of the Church and the only true God. We are not trying to discover a characteristic mark of divinity which this God will have in common with other gods. We are not concerned with any idea of the divine under which we will subsume the only true God with other gods. We are well aware that, if we do this, we shall

be enquiring in fact not about the idea of God, but, in common with the worshippers of those other gods, about the idea of man, about the sum of his wishes and longings, about the highest embodiment, in absolute form, of our own being. Therefore now as before we do not enquire in disregard of God's revelation, but with our attention concentrated upon it and only upon it.¹⁰⁶

Barth links the uniqueness of God to the act and love of God because it again answers the question, "Who is God?" It grounded both act and love because otherwise it could be anybody's act and love, not God's.

We understood the being of God as moved, although self-moved, as life living from its own centre. We understood His loving to be loving for its own sake, an unconditioned, utterly sovereign love, positing its own basis and purpose. Without this more concrete determination, without this characterisation of the uniqueness of His living and loving, we are obviously not speaking of God's living and loving, but of life and love generally, and therefore definitely not of God. We must now take this particular determination as our present point of departure.¹⁰⁷

This point of departure leads us to the statement: "God's being as He who lives and loves is being in freedom."¹⁰⁸ This, in turn, defines Lordship and sovereignty. "With the idea of freedom we simply affirm what we would be affirming if we were to characterise God as the Lord."¹⁰⁹ Lordship and sovereignty are defined by the living and loving Lord, not by any outside source.

Freedom has positive and negative connotations. It "is more than the absence of limits, restrictions, or conditions."¹¹⁰ That would be its negative attributes and depends upon being free from another. The main emphasis is positive. Freedom "in its positive and proper qualities means to be grounded in one's own being, to be determined and moved by oneself."¹¹¹ This is Barth's definition of freedom. It is far less a "freedom from" something, for that would imply a

necessary relationship from which one has to be free. It implies a defining of a self over against another self. That is not divine freedom. Divine freedom is a self freedom, a self-governing, a self-grounding. It is a grounding in one's own self which requires no other self. It is being oneself.

Divine freedom is action as opposed to re-action. Divine freedom moves itself, defines itself. It is not coerced. It is its own definer and action. It is self-grounding and governing. Barth acknowledges that this is what the early church called the "*aseitas Dei*,"¹¹² but he strikes a very important note in that regard. *Aseitas* is not *independentia*.

But the replacement of the term *aseitas* by *independentia*, and the content of the explanation, reveal that the tendency was for that which must always be our primary concern when it is a question of the being of God, the positive aspect of God's freedom to exist in Himself, to be less clearly grasped and considered less important than the negative aspect of God's freedom from all external conditions. The inevitable result was to miss the biblical idea of God, to which there was a close approximation in the favourite citation of Exodus 3:14.¹¹³

Again Barth will not be drawn into a singular definition of the freedom of God as "freedom from" something. The positive aspect of freedom must be the emphasis. It is God's grounding himself in himself which is the most important. It is this freedom of grounding himself in himself which means that God cannot be restricted by the negative aspects of freedom. On the contrary, God can limit God's self and, in fact, does. Scripture tells us that the God who grounds himself does not take on negative aspects of freedom in order to prove himself, but willingly limits himself for the benefit of the creature. To be sure, God is unconditioned and unlimited. But scripture tells us that God limits God's self in order to know and relate to us.

According to the biblical testimony, God has the prerogative to be free without being limited by His freedom from external conditioning, free also with regard to His freedom, free not to surrender Himself to it, but to use it to give Himself to this communion and to practise this faithfulness in it, in this way being really free, free in Himself. God must not only be unconditioned but, in the absoluteness in which He sets up this fellowship, He can and will also be conditioned. He who can and does do this is the God of Holy Scripture, the triune God known to us in His revelation. This ability, proved and manifested to us in His action, constitutes His freedom.¹¹⁴

Barth again takes up *aseitas* and *independentia* and explains that we cannot use abstract concepts of God's freedom to be grounded in God's own being. It is not that words like "unconditioned" or "absolute" are useless, but that they must be defined by God's freedom grounded in himself. The words alone do nothing to help us.

To let these words rule our understanding of God's freedom would be to let Platonic philosophy decide for us who God is and what God's freedom is, and to define God in the highest human terms.

If we fail to bear all this in mind, if we view the being of God in its abstractly understood transcendence in accordance with the disastrous suggestions of Neo-Platonism, i.e., as negative from the point of view of the being of the reality distinct from Himself, then we have substituted for the biblical idea of God an idea which is easily recognisable as the highest idea conceivable to man. For what is the idea of the infinite, the unconditioned or the absolute but the idea of our own limits, which suggest to us both our transcendent goal and origin, but which in themselves can be understood only as our limits and therefore as the negation, the non-being of all that we are? If we interpret this our non-being as pointing to true being, if we make our limits the object of an apotheosis, we are in no sense testifying to God. On the contrary, by this abuse of the name of God, we are affirming our awareness that these limits suggest our transcendent goal and origin. We are expressing the deep appreciation and esteem we feel for this our goal and origin, and for our own ideal image, carefully purged of all imperfection, but still only postulated as far as its being (even its divine being) is concerned.¹¹⁵

God's freedom is "His freedom to begin with Himself."¹¹⁶ It is

not that God posits God's own existence, but that God already is. It is what Barth considers his first definition of the aseity of God.

When we say that God begins with Himself, we do not say that He needs a basis in which He must define and delimit Himself in differentiation from what He is not, or from His own non-existence, in order to have His being within this limit. We say rather that He Himself, in being, is His own basis, and that as such He differentiates His being from what He is not, His existence from His non-existence, and even from the very thought of His non-existence, the basis and the differentiation being confirmed in the very act of His being. Again, it is not that His being needs this confirmation, but that the very fact of His being, free from all need, is in fact this confirmation. This is the first primary meaning of God's being in freedom, in aseity.¹¹⁷

Only now can we go on to say that God's aseity means, secondly, that God has freedom from outside influence, "that He is the One who is free from all origination, conditioning or determination from without, by that which is not Himself."¹¹⁸ Barth calls it the "exercise"¹¹⁹ of God's freedom. God does not need any other being in order to be God. God is God in God's act, love and freedom in God's own trinitarian being. God does not need outside influence in order to define himself over against anything else. The second proposition, that God is free from outside influence, comes only on the basis of the first, that God's freedom is freedom grounded in God's act.

There have certainly been criticisms of Barth's theological method, both from liberals and the more conservative or fundamental theological spectrum. R.A. Muller is a primary example of one, however, who, although seeing those two sides and what he thinks Barth is saying, still believes Barth's method does not do justice either to the history of the church or, especially, God's revelation before the incarnation of the logos. He states¹²⁰ that Barth cannot be accepted and digested without critique and that theology must go forward --

especially with regard to the fact that Barth did something fundamentally different in the history of the church in his doctrine of the revelation of God through Christ only. In the history of the church Barth's radical Christocentrism is an aberration. While not to be taken lightly, Muller's objection is also not to be accepted.

In light of what we have just seen, it has become clear that a wider concept of the Word of God entails a God behind God. If one were to take up Muller's argument, one would end up with a God behind God and all the theological problems that entails, i.e., do we know the real God in Jesus Christ and can we trust God if we are not sure of who God is? It is a tenet of this thesis that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is the "one, unique in kind" revelation of God, the revelation by which all revelations must be examined. While this may not mean that all of Barth's theology is an adequate appraisal of the various doctrines drawn from that one essential revelation, nevertheless, theology must be done from Jesus Christ outwards. The next two chapters will be an attempt to discern whether or not Barth has done this adequately.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER 4

¹This is what R.A. Muller has called Torrance and others who agree with Barth. R.A. Muller, "The Barth Legacy: New Athanasias or Origen Redivivus? A Response to T.F. Torrance", *The Thomist*, 54, 4, Oct., 1990. Cf. also Muller, "The Place and Importance of Karl Barth in the Twentieth Century: A Review Essay", *Westminster Theological Journal*, 50, 1988, 127-156.

²I/2/869. In their introduction to II/1, Bromiley and Torrance say, "It is here for the first time that we really get anything like an 'epistemology' from Barth, and we get it here because the possibility of knowledge of God cannot be discussed apart from the actuality of our knowledge of Him. In other words, we can only understand how God is knowable from the way in which He actually gives Himself to be known. Hence, a true epistemology can be derived only from the actual unfolding of the content of the Word of God, and therefore might best come at the end rather than at the beginning of our dogmatics." II/1/vii.

³"One could say that all Barth has done is reverse the usual order of the two doctrines of the nature of God and the trinity of God. But this exchange has radical consequences. For a not-yet-trinitarian doctrine of the nature of God can be discussed first only if we think we are able to identify God without reference to his relation to Jesus Christ. The set of descriptions we use will depend on corresponding items we know or claim to know of God: if, for example, we identify God as the one 'who is eternal' we must know that God is eternal. If we identify God before speaking of Christ, this knowledge will have to be knowledge gained by the religious quest; it will have to be knowledge of the God of religion -- for there is no other sort of knowledge of God if we are to abstract from his self-objectifying in Jesus Christ." (R. Jenson, *God after God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future, Seen in the Work of Karl Barth*, The Bobbs-Merrill Co. Indianapolis, 1969, p. 98-9.)

⁴Parker, in his article, "Barth on Revelation" (*Scottish Journal of Theology*, 13, 1960), says: "In none of them [Barth's writings] does he begin by establishing the existence of God. Nor, however, does he treat it as self-evident. With him it forms an integral part of the knowledge of God through His revelation in Jesus Christ. In Him God reveals His existence as well as His nature." p. 380.

⁵Cf. I/1/300.

⁶*Institutes*, I. 13. 21.

⁷I/1/301.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹For this analysis I am indebted to E. Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh, 1976; C. Gunton,

Becoming and Being, Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford, 1978; R. Jenson, *God after God*, The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Indianapolis, 1969; and G. Hunsinger, *How To Read Karl Barth*, Oxford Univ. Press, Oxford, 1991.

¹⁰"Theology does not make its starting point the fact that we believe God has revealed Himself. Certainly, unless theology does believe this, it has no claim to be called Christian. But its basis is the objective fact of revelation and not faith in it. Faith is man's acknowledgment of the objective fact of revelation. It has no power of deciding whether God has revealed Himself, but gratefully accepts the fact that He has done so and derives all its life and strength from that." Parker, *Op. cit.*, p. 370. "Theology starts with actuality (God making himself known) and proceeds to possibility (whether he has made himself known), i.e. the existence of God will appear *a posteriori* and in the course of the exposition of the Faith." R. Crawford, "The Theological Method of Karl Barth", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 25, 1972, p. 321.

¹¹"When Barth expresses the fact that God has revealed Himself, what he always has in mind is that God has revealed Himself in the existence of the man Jesus of Nazareth." Parker, *Op. cit.*, pp. 370-1.

¹²The thesis in this dissertation is that because Barth sees the Word of God as only Jesus Christ, he reforms Calvin and answers Gilkey's questions in the modern era. Thus, von Balthasar's statement is not completely true. "As the doctrine of *Church Dogmatics* unfolds, the central notion of *God's Word* is gradually replaced by another: *Jesus Christ, God and man*." (p. 100) To say this is completely true would be to disregard Barth's exegesis of John 1:1-2 in II/2, which specifically defines Jesus as the Logos, or Word, of God. Barth did not replace "God's Word" with Jesus Christ but narrowed God's Word such that neither scripture nor the Bible could be called God's Word in the same way that Jesus was God's Word.

¹³I/1/112. "It would be very easy to make the Bible into a position from which we could verify or affirm the fact that God has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. Is the Bible an independent verification of revelation, so that revelation is not in fact self-authenticating? Certainly, it has often been regarded in this light - for example, it has been treated as containing a number of revealed propositions, which can be appealed to in support of this or that doctrine, including revelation. Such proof-texts can be used as independent verifications of revelation. But although the Bible occupies a unique position as the witness and proclamation of the fact that revelation has taken place, it does not, and what is more, makes it plain that it does not, act independently and as an authority itself." (Parker, *Op. cit.*, p. 370.)

¹⁴I/1/119. J.D. Bettis, in his article "Theology in the Public Debate" (*Scottish Journal of Theology*, 22, 1969), says, "Barth does not begin with a prior understanding of who or what God is and then attempt to argue that this previously understood God really does reveal himself to men." (p. 390) R. Jenson says, "The formal pattern by which the assertion of the triune being of God emerges is always

the same: the move from the formal structure of the event of revelation to the content of what is revealed, or rather, the refusal to separate form and content at all." (*Op. cit.*, p. 105.)

¹⁵I/1/118-9.

¹⁶*Ibid.* p. 320.

¹⁷"Veiling means that God comes where he is not really expected. He comes where any spiritual interpretation as such is impossible, because he comes in the concreteness of flesh, or into the world of sin...If God did not veil himself, he would smash into man's world. Or man, in order to apprehend him, would have to be taken out of this world...God's veiling in Christ, or in the flesh, does not imply that revelation is something which is veiled and then will be unveiled. It also includes God's unveiling in his veiling. These two statements, which on the surface may appear to be the same, are both necessary for Barth's analysis of the nature of revelation..." (J. Dillenberger, *God Hidden and Revealed: The Interpretation of Luther's deus absconditus and its Significance for Religious Thought*. Muhlenberg Press, 1953, p. 124.)

¹⁸I/1/168.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰Bettis, *Op. cit.*, p. 390.

²¹Cf. Dillenberger, *Op. cit.*, p. 120. "It is not as if in Jesus Christ anything different from God were revealed, or anything less than God, or merely one part or aspect of God. He whom Christ reveals is God Himself in His wholeness. If that which is revealed were different from God or less than God or even just an aspect of God, we should no longer be able to speak of Christ being the revelation of God. In that case, if we wished to know God, we should have to turn elsewhere for our knowledge...The God who reveals Himself to us in Jesus Christ is our Creator and Redeemer, God in His wholeness, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." (Parker, *Op. cit.*, pp. 372-3.)

²²"The prescriptive definition of God is He who comes to men in such a way that they can really know Him without His losing His own freedom and identity in doing so." (Bettis, *Op. cit.*, p. 390.)

²³Dillenberger, *Op. cit.*, p. 121.

²⁴I/1/295.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶Bettis, *Op. cit.*, p. 389f.

²⁷I/1/296.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹K. Barth, "The Basic Forms of Theological Thought", *The Expository Times*, vol. XLIX, No. 1, Oct., 1937, pp. 5-6. This was also very important for Barth's disagreement with Harnack. "But perhaps the most significant of Barth's attempts to account for the contrast between his and Harnack's approaches to theology is to be found in his repeated insistence that for him the *object* of theology is determinative of the method, not vice versa, as he believed had become the case since the Enlightenment and Schleiermacher." S.W. Sykes, "Barth on the Centre of Theology", *Karl Barth: Studies of his Theological Method*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1979, p. 29.

³⁰"It was the Nicene *homoousion*, especially as set out in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, that provided [Barth] with the key insight into the trinitarian faith that what God is in his saving self-revelation in history as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, he is in the inherent relations of his own eternal Being as Father, Son and Holy Spirit." (T.F. Torrance, "The Legacy of Karl Barth (1886-1968)", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 39, 1986, p. 298.)

³¹All these Muller takes up in "The Legacy of Karl Barth"; cf. n. 1.

³²I/1/296.

³³I/2/123.

³⁴G.W. Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology*, Oxford Univ. Press, New York and Oxford, 1991, *passim*

³⁵Muller, *Op. cit.*, pp. 675-6.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 676.

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹IV/2/51.

⁴⁰I/1/173.

⁴¹*Ibid.* p. 321. Cf. I/1/173.

⁴²Jensen, *Op. cit.*, p. 100.

⁴³I/1/303.

⁴⁴*Ibid.* p. 312. Jensen says: "The fundamental identifying description of God is, according to Barth, that God is the one 'who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ.' The doctrine of the Trinity is but an interpretation and analysis of this expression; it is an explication of the Christian concept of revelation....If what happened with Jesus is 'revelation,' then we have a triune God." (*God after God*, p. 99.)

⁴⁵I/1/306.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 316.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 381.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 382.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 371.

⁵⁰II/1/257.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 299. "Revelation means God's interpretation of himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We have now become acquainted with Barth's Trinitarian explication of this subject matter and from this knowledge we may already note how Barth in the exposition of God's being theologically defines the concept of being by the criterion of revelation." Jüngel, *Op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁵²*Ibid.*, pp. 260-1. "After what has been said about revelation as the self-interpretation of God, it will be clear that Barth's exposition of God's being does not employ the concept of being in the sense of a general doctrine of being. Barth's *Dogmatics* makes ontological statements all along the line. But this *Dogmatics* is not an ontology; at any rate not in the sense of a doctrine of being formulated from a general concept of being within which the being of God (as highest being, as being-itself, etc.) would be treated at the appropriate place." (Jüngel, *Op. cit.*, p. 62.)

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 260.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁵"It was upon that Christological foundation that the Chalcedonian formulation was built. In accepting that development, however, Karl Barth laid greater stress upon the *dynamic* character of God's self-revelation, by thinking through the application of the *homoousion* to the incarnate activity of God in Jesus Christ and in his Spirit. This was wholly in line with the Athanasian insistence that what God is in his saving Word and Act he is inherently in his own Being as God, which he expressed in the twin concepts of *enousios logos* and *enousios energeia*. That is to say, the word which God communicates to us in Jesus Christ is Word that belongs to the inner Being of God, and the Activity by which God saves us in Jesus is Activity that also belongs to the inner Being of God. It is by and through himself in his very Being as God that God reveals himself to us and saves us. It was this stress upon the consubstantiality of the Word and Activity of God that Karl Barth made so distinctive of his doctrine of the Triune God. Thus instead of following the all-too-traditional way of presenting Chalcedonian Christology in terms of a static union of statically conceived divine and human natures, he recast it all in dynamic as well as ontological terms. This led him to his doctrine of God as God's Being-in-his-Act and his Act-in-his-Being, which is surely one of his most important contributions to

Christian theology." (T.F. Torrance, "The Legacy of Karl Barth", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 39, 1986, pp. 299-300.)

⁵⁶II/1/261. "...the concept of being which is taken up in all impartiality must immediately be adequately defined, both theologically and ontologically, if it is to be suited for responsible speech about God's being. But that means, for Barth, that the concept of being must be measured by the revelation of God. God's revelation is the criterion of all ontological statements in theology." (Jüngel, *Op. cit.*, p. 62-3.) This is again in line with the reform Barth made, to the effect that it is one's understanding of revelation and therefore the Trinity which effects one's entire theology. We shall see this consistently throughout the next two chapters.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 262.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 263.

⁶²*Ibid.*, p. 264.

⁶³*Ibid.*

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 267.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 272.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 268.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*

⁶⁸II/1/269. "God's freedom is that of a *subject*, of a *person*. God's freedom means that he is always 'I' in his action, never 'it' or even 'he.' This is the difference between God and other 'person.' Other persons are always -- precisely in the relations by which they are persons at all -- also 'he' and 'it.' Other persons are subjects of the relations by which they are persons, but are at the same time observers and passive objects in those same relations. God is never other than the active and deciding agent. God is the person whose personhood suffers no infringements, not even infringements arising from himself." (Jensen, *Op. cit.*, pp. 126-7.)

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, p. 269.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 271.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, p. 273. "Because there is no way past the temporality of God's action, there is no static 'essence' of God behind God's

act.... The act and event in question is the revelation. God is the event of what happens with Jesus." (Jensen, *Op. cit.*, p. 125.)

⁷²*Ibid.*, p. 273.

⁷³*Ibid.*

⁷⁴Jüngel, *Op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁷⁵II/1/274.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, p. 275.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, p. 276.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*

⁸⁰*Ibid.*

⁸¹*Ibid.*, p. 277.

⁸²Cf. *Ibid.*

⁸³*Ibid.*, p. 279.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, p. 278.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, p. 279.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, p. 280.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 280-1.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, p. 283.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*

⁹¹*Ibid.*, p. 284.

⁹²*Ibid.*, pp. 284-5.

⁹³*Ibid.*, p. 285.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 286.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*

⁹⁶*Ibid.*

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 287.

- ⁹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 288.
- ⁹⁹*Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 290-1.
- ¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, pp. 292-3.
- ¹⁰²*Ibid.*, p. 296.
- ¹⁰³*Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, p. 297.
- ¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, p. 298.
- ¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 298-9.
- ¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 300-1.
- ¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, p. 301.
- ¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁰*Ibid.*
- ¹¹¹*Ibid.*
- ¹¹²*Ibid.*, p. 302.
- ¹¹³*Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 303.
- ¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 303-4.
- ¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 304.
- ¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 306.
- ¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 307.
- ¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 308.
- ¹²⁰Cf. n. 1.

THE WORD OF GOD: ELECTION

A. Revelation and Jesus Christ

"I would have preferred to follow Calvin's doctrine of predestination much more closely, instead of departing from it so radically....But I could not and cannot do so. As I let the Bible itself speak to me on these matters, as I meditated upon what I seemed to hear, I was driven irresistibly to reconstruction."¹ Because of Barth's doctrines of revelation, the Trinity and God, Barth realised that his doctrine of election would take a different direction than Calvin's. The result of these doctrines was that predestination must go a different way.

1. LOCATION

Calvin placed predestination at the end of Book III, as the last element of the Christian life, part of the doctrine of salvation, as mediated, but not defined, by Christ. In sharp contrast, Barth places predestination within the doctrine of God, thus "giving it precedence over the doctrine of providence...."² From his understanding of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ as the real and true explanation of who God is and from his understanding of the Trinitarian character of this God who reveals God's self in Jesus Christ, he now makes the case that the very character of this God is that of an electing God. Who God is is seen in election. God's very nature is seen in the fact that God elects God's self and in so doing elects God's people. "The triune God is defined as one whose reality takes shape in

election...."³ Thus, we cannot speak about God without saying that God elects.

"God is none other than the One who in His Son or Word elects Himself, and in and with Himself elects His people,"⁴ and for this reason election is paramount. It is not paramount, however, in the Reformation idea of a "tenet which took precedence over that of the election -- the tenet of the decree of God in general."⁵ There is no decree or concept of God in general. It is the decree of God in Jesus Christ, and "as the Word which together with the revealed and eternal being of God we must accept as the determination of the decision in which God is God."⁶

Election is paramount because the doctrine of reconciliation is paramount. "Dogma has no more exalted or profound word -- essentially, indeed, it has no other word -- than this: that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself."⁷ Although the doctrine of reconciliation will not be taken up extensively until volume four, it is necessary to see that it has priority over other doctrines precisely because it is God's decision within God's self to reconcile the world to himself. It is God's election of God's self and the world with him. Thus, election must be seen as a part of the doctrine of God, not tacked on to any other doctrine. Barth expressly denies any other place for election in dogmatics as a whole. It cannot follow the doctrine of God nor be final element in the doctrine of providence. He denies the exposition of the Reformers of the 17th century, Aquinas' understanding, Zwingli's, and all of Calvin's different placements in the successive editions of the *Institutes*.⁸ Because God elects God's self first, we must see election within the

doctrine of God and acknowledge that God's election of God's self in Jesus Christ makes grace and reconciliation the paramount elements.¹¹ This location of election has profound implications for the doctrine of providence. It places the providence of God within a doctrine of God which already encompasses the gracious election of God. As we shall see in Chapter 6, providence will not be derived from the knowledge of God the Creator, but from the knowledge of God whose being is constituted as an electing and gracious God.¹²

2. SOURCE

"What is the source of the doctrine of predestination?"¹³ Jesus Christ is the centre around which theology revolves. He is the source.

...[T]he unfolding and presentation of the content of the Word of God must take place fundamentally in such a way that the Word of God is understood as the centre and foundation of dogmatics and of Church proclamation, like a circle whose periphery forms the starting-point for a limited number of lines which in dogmatics are to be drawn to a certain distance in all directions. The fundamental lack of principle in the dogmatic method is clear from the fact that it does not proceed from the centre but from the periphery of the circle or, metaphor apart, from the self-poising and self-authenticating Word of God.¹⁴

But here he goes into more detail. On what are we going to base the doctrine? Barth points out several bases which cannot be used. First, we must respond as Calvin did and return to scripture. To return to "tradition", be it Reformed or not, would be to succumb to a Roman Catholic understanding of tradition, and begin to elevate tradition to equal status with scripture. We must return to scripture just as Calvin did.

Nor, second, can we begin with the usefulness of doctrines.

Although Calvin was correct that the doctrines do have their usefulness, to begin there would be to watch a doctrine disintegrate into laws which have nothing to do with the Gospel. While Barth agrees with them "factually",¹³ to make them our foundation would destroy the Christian understanding.

Third, and perhaps most important, Barth emphatically claims that predestination cannot be based on experience. No amount of recognizing good and evil in this world, no amount of perception of this world will tell us who is elected and who is not.¹⁴

This argument can legitimately be levelled against Calvin, although he did not begin with it,

he did buttress his doctrine so emphatically by the appeal to it that we can hardly fail to recognise that much of the pathos and emotional power with which he defended it, and to an even greater extent the form in which he did so, were determined by this experience, the effects of which were inevitably serious from the point of view of the purity of the doctrine.¹⁵

It was the negative factor as over against the positive, the fact that there are those who reject the Gospel as well as those who accept it, which Calvin perceived and used in his conception of predestination.

And it is this limiting experience, the negative in conjunction with the positive, which is obviously the decisive factor as Calvin thought he must see it. It was out of this presupposition, laid down with axiomatic certainty, that there arose for him the *magnae et arduae quaestiones* for which he saw an answer in what he found to be the teaching of Scripture concerning the election; questions which he thought he himself ought to answer in his doctrine of election supposedly gathered from Scripture. Within the sphere of the Church he saw men in whose being, words and actions when confronted by the Gospel proclaimed to them he thought he could recognise only that which Scripture describes as the divine refection, and therefore the hardening accompanying the divine election.¹⁶

It is important to note that it is because Calvin was so sensitive to the evil and hypocrisy in the world that he made this distinction. However,

even when we agree that the experience which claimed his attention was and is solidly founded, and does in some way obtrude itself, it must still be held against him that such experience can never claim more than human value and relevance. No matter what practical or theoretical results it may have, according to Calvin's own presuppositions it could not and cannot ever claim the character of a revelation.¹⁷

The question, does doctrine begin with experience or with scripture, points quite dramatically to the hermeneutical question, that is, whether scripture answers humanity's questions or is scripture free to say what it wills?

If the undoubted statistics of this construct are taken as the point of departure for reflection on the divine election of grace, strengthened by the influence of so clever and determined a perception as that of Calvin, then quite obviously Scripture is no longer able to say freely what it will so say. It can only answer the questions put to it by man. What it wills to do first is to give us with its answers the right questions. "At the very outset, before he consulted the Bible," Calvin had "reached a decision which -- quite independently of the answer of Scripture -- determined the character of his outlook on predestination in accordance with the question put by experience" (H. Otten, *op. cit.* p. 29). But that is the very thing which should not happen. If it does, then there is a pressing danger -- which Calvin himself did not escape -- that the divine election which it is our task to explore and expound will take on far too great a similarity with the perhaps very well grounded and very praiseworthy but still human electing of the outstanding theological thinker, and that the electing God there revealed will come to resemble far too closely the electing, and more particularly the rejecting theologian.¹⁸

This question is necessarily one which will be brought up repeatedly, and will be discussed throughout this essay. Barth attacks it with greater precision here as he stresses the fact that theology and doctrine do not begin with humanity and our questions but with God and

God's word to us. This has important implications for the doctrine of predestination. Predestination, although it is concerned with God's care and concern for all people, is not about whether individuals are saved or not. Predestination is about the one person, Jesus Christ, and those elected in him.¹⁹

Fourth, the doctrine of predestination cannot be based on any kind of divine omnipotent will in the abstract. God is no omnipotent being who exercises sovereignty through arbitrary rule. If God were some omnipotent sovereign who made election a particular aspect of God's omnipotence, then "predestination is only one moment within the world-order established and executed by the principle of freedom and necessity proclaimed under the name of God. The doctrine of predestination is only one moment in a deterministic scheme."²⁰

This particular basis, against which Barth is speaking, concerns a very important misconception within the doctrine of predestination. Is predestination one aspect of divine sovereignty, or is divine sovereignty to be understood as a part of the divine election of grace? If sovereignty is the over-arching concept, then God and God's sovereignty become concepts. God becomes subject to human perceptions of what it means to be sovereign and omnipotent. If God's election of grace has priority, then we must look to God's advent of that election in order to understand sovereignty. This has important implications for Calvin's doctrine of predestination, to which we shall return later in this chapter.

If we begin quite simply with the divine world-government which holds sway in and over all things, if we think that the election should be subordinated to this world-government as one specific instance of it, then it is difficult to escape a twofold danger: first, that of losing sight of the primal decision which is identical with the basis of the

election, and therefore of the eternal divine being in the determination and limitation in which it is the divine being; and second, and in consequence, that of missing the line or succession of the later divine decisions which derive from this primal decision. If we do that, then ultimately and in effect we can describe the divine world-government, and with it the overruling of divine providence, only as the sequence and inter-relation of the actions of absolute caprice.²¹

Throughout these foundations of election which Barth rejects, we have seen one thread running throughout. Election, as ^{with} any doctrine of the Christian faith, cannot be based upon humanity in any way. Neither humanity's tradition, usefulness, experience or understanding of divine omnipotence, nor any other human perception of what is important for itself or God may define God or God's election. This is a cardinal thesis for Barth, and we shall return to it again and again.

This thesis is important for Barth's rejection of our basing election on God's accommodation. We cannot base election on anything other than God's own self.

If we are to lay hold of the concept of the true God, we shall do so only as we conceive of Him in His *dominium*, in His actuality as Lord and Ruler. We shall do so only as we conceive of Him in the determination and limitation which are peculiar to Him, which He has not taken upon Himself as something additional, in His relationship with the world or as an accommodation to it, but which are the characteristics of His presence and activity in the world because they are the determination and limitation proper to His own eternal being, so assuredly has He decided for them by the decree of His eternal will.²²

This rejection of all human understandings of who God is and what God does necessarily will require us to rethink and observe how we human beings go about understanding God and God's election.

To a more positive view of this election of grace Barth now turns, and this election of grace Barth considers the very basis of

the relationship between God and humanity.²³ This section on the foundation of the election will be enlarged upon in a subsequent paragraph, but it is necessary for Barth to offer it in the beginning and take on a few of the problems he has found, especially in Calvin's theology.

He begins by reminding his readers that Christianity does not have any kind of abstract God that can be explained any kind of way. Scripture does not let us wander around in all sorts of concepts about God, but always "concentrates our attention and thoughts upon one single point and what is to be known at that point."²⁴ That point is Jesus Christ. Only in the particular man, Jesus Christ, can the doctrines of God and humanity come together. The doctrine of God is not about God in general nor is the doctrine of humanity about humanity in general, but about Jesus Christ, the electing God and the elected human being.²⁵

This concentration on the particular human being, Jesus Christ, points us directly to the divine decision to be with and for the people. It is not forced on God, but is God's own decision in favour of the people, "the self-determination of God as Lord and Shepherd of this people, the self-determination of this people as 'his people, and the sheep of his pasture'".²⁶

As we have to do with Jesus Christ, we have to do with the electing God. For election is obviously the first and basic and decisive thing which we have always to say concerning this revelation, this activity, this presence of God in the world, and therefore concerning the eternal decree and the eternal self-determination of God which bursts through and is manifested at this point. Already this self-determination, as a confirmation of the free love of God, is itself the election or choice of God. It is God's choice that He wills to be God in this determination and not otherwise. It is God's choice that He moves towards man, that He wills to be and is the Covenant-partner of man. It

is God's choice that under the name of Jesus Christ He wills to give life to the substance of His people's history and to that people itself, constituting Himself its Lord and Shepherd. It is God's choice that in this specific form, in one age, in the very midst of that people's history, He acts on behalf of all ages, thus giving to all created time, becoming indeed, its meaning and content. It is God's choice that for the sake of the Head whose name it bears He has created and established this particular body, this people, to be the sign of blessing and judgment, the instrument of His love and the sacrament of His movement towards men and each individual man. It is God's choice that at every stage in its history He deals with this people with that purpose in view.²⁷

Barth also speaks to this from another direction, that is that to know who God is we must look to Jesus Christ.

To put it the other way round: If we would know who God is, and what is the meaning and purpose of His election, and in what respect He is the electing God, then we must look away from all others, and excluding all side-glances or secondary thoughts, we must look only upon and to the name of Jesus Christ, and the existence and history of the people of God enclosed within Him.²⁸

This narrowing of election to one human being, Jesus Christ, necessarily brings Barth to yet another argument with Calvin. Calvin, as we have seen, saw Christ as the mirror of election, the *speculum electionis*. This is indeed vital to an understanding of election as it reminds us that it is in this one person that we see our election and that in election God is free.²⁹ But Barth's question is also crucial here: does Calvin really think seriously about Christ as the mirror of election? Does Calvin think this through completely? Barth believes that while Calvin may have intended to keep Christ as the centre, because he did not think it through seriously and fully enough it became a pastoral understanding of election. The real meaning of election, the eternal decree, was understood by theologians while the ordinary people were to be treated gently with a more pastoral

understanding. At best one could certainly say that Calvin had great feeling and sensitivity towards people, to his congregation. At worst, however, Calvin's understanding forces the issue of whether there are not two wills in God, whether there is one will which, in Christ, is comforting and pastoral, and another will which is a decision preceding Christ and, in fact, God's true will.³⁰

This faces us with an election which is hidden, which is not known through God's revelation in Jesus Christ, or perhaps not known through God's revelation at all. Thus, humankind is left with a relationship in election with God which "is independent of Jesus Christ. How, then, can we attain to any sure knowledge of God or ourselves? How, then, can we have any sure knowledge of this relationship? How can we be certain that it is good to be so fully in the hands of God as we are proclaimed to be when we assert that God elects?"³¹

These questions Calvin could not answer because he could not allow for looking away from the eternal decree.

But while we may gratefully acknowledge the right intention expressed in the Reformation allusion to Christ, this is the very thing which we cannot say. The christological reference was warmly and impressively made, but it is left standing in the air. It cannot be carried through theologically, and for this reason. It does forbid in practice any glancing away at an absolute decree of God, i.e., a decree which is different from the eternal saving decision of God as made in Jesus Christ. Yet it does not exclude any such glancing away in theory, but more or less expressly permits it.³²

It has been maintained that Calvin can reject this criticism of Barth because Calvin states that we cannot look to the Father "severed from his Son."³³ Because Calvin can rely on the revelation in Christ, he can deny Barth's accusation.³⁴

The question remains, however, whether we are able to look to the Father "severed from the Son"? Can God be divided in such a way that when we look to the Father without the Son we see something different than when we look to the Father with the Son? Just after Calvin has said that we cannot sever the two he says, "For since it is into his [Christ's] body the Father has destined those to be engrafted whom he has willed from eternity to be his own...."³⁵ Is this not severing the two? Has not the Father willed one thing "from eternity" without the Son, and then later placed them in Christ's body? Just at the point where Calvin could give a declaration that he can rely on the revelation in Christ precisely because the revelation in Christ is the revelation of God's own true self, he divides Father and Son once again. By stating that the Father has done one thing from eternity and only later brings in Christ, Calvin has divided Father and Son in such a way that the Son cannot possibly reveal God's own self. There is one God who has made an eternal hidden decision, and there is God's son who collects those whom God has decided in favour of.

The question of a hidden election, as we saw in the first several chapters, will be decisive for a different understanding of providence, for it will necessitate a providence seen through Jesus Christ. It demands a providence which is revealed through Jesus Christ, not from a knowledge of God behind God's revelation in Christ.

The crucial question comes down to this: "Will not the question of the hidden God emerge one day as the question of the true God?"³⁶ Despite all the evidence for the God we know in Jesus Christ, the question concerning whether or not that God is true remains open, and humanity is forced to look elsewhere to discern the real and true God.

Despite Calvin's many Christological references his main emphasis was on the "secret *electio Patris*",³⁷ and as a result his readers are left wondering who the real God is. We are left with a pastoral understanding through Christ which does not get to the main issue of election. That remains secret. Our relationship with God is thus no relationship; it is a decree.

3. RELATIONSHIP

We have seen often enough that, according to Barth, the source of errors with Calvin's doctrine was that Jesus Christ was not seen as the source of all doctrine and indeed God himself, but one doctrine within a theology that came from somewhere else. For Barth, Jesus Christ is no medium which God could or could not use. Jesus Christ is no "form or figure in which God could declare Himself to us or exist for us and yet be quite different in and by Himself."³⁸ If we are to see doctrine clearly, we must see it through the human being, Jesus Christ.

In avoiding the different sources of error, we saw that they had one feature in common: the negligence or arbitrariness with which even in the Church the attempt was made to go past or to go beyond Jesus Christ in the consideration and conception and definition of God, and in speech about God. But when theology allows itself on any pretext to be jostled away from that name, God is inevitably crowded out by a hypostatized image of man. Theology must begin with Jesus Christ, and not with general principles, however better, or, at any rate, more relevant and illuminating, they may appear to be: as though He were a continuation of the knowledge and Word of God, and not its root and origin, not indeed the very Word of itself. Theology must also end with Him, and not with supposedly self-evident general conclusions from what is particularly enclosed and disclosed in Him: as though the fruits could be shaken from this tree; as though in the things of God there were anything general which we could know and designate in addition to and even independently of this particular.³⁹

But this fundamental assertion reminds us of who God is, that God is a God who *wills* to be in relation with God's creatures. God does not create and run away. God creates and in so doing places God's self in a relation which thereby determines who God is. God has chosen to be in relation, and any other idea of God does not conform to the God who reveals God's self in Jesus Christ. Any other God would be an alien God to the Christian.⁴⁰

The partner which God has in this relationship is Jesus Christ, and through him the people represented by him. That is, Jesus Christ is both Son of God and therefore sitting next to God, but also Jesus of Nazareth, the "Representative of the people."⁴¹

The history of this relation is the history of the covenant, and it is this relationship which begins the doctrine of election. There are two aspects to this relation: grace and claim. The claim Barth will take up later under *The Command of God*, but grace is what he considers the doctrine of election.

The election of grace is the sum of the Gospel -- we must put it as pointedly as that. But more, the election of grace is the whole of the Gospel, the Gospel *in nuce*... God is God in His being as the One who loves in freedom. This is revealed as a benefit conferred upon us in the fact which corresponds to the truth of God's being, the fact that God elects in His grace, that He moves towards man, in his dealings within this covenant with the one man Jesus, and the people represented by Him. All the joy and the benefit of His whole work as Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer, all the blessings which are divine and therefore real blessings, all the promise of the Gospel which has been declared: all these are grounded and determined in the fact that God is the God of the eternal election of His grace.⁴²

This must be considered a primary point both in Barth's understanding of election and his departure from those who have gone before him. Predestination is not "neutral in face of the antithesis

of fear and terror", a theorem "which is quite unaffected by the distinction between right and wrong", a "mixed message of joy and terror" or "dialectical". It is "a proclamation of joy", "light and not darkness."⁴³

And we introduce the first and most radical point with our thesis that the doctrine of election must be understood quite definitely and unequivocally as Gospel; that it is not something neutral on the yonder side of Yes and No; that it is not No but Yes; that it is not Yes and No, but in its substance, in the origin and scope of its utterance, it is altogether Yes.⁴⁴

This corresponds to another aspect of his argument, that God's attributes cannot be divided so that in one place there is mercy and in another righteousness is found. There is a unity. This unity of God's attributes, this refusal to make God merciful in one place and righteous in another, points to the inevitable question of whether election and rejection are "two species within the one genus designated by the term predestination."⁴⁵ Barth refuses to do this and criticises Calvin for this "fatal parallelism".⁴⁶ God's attributes are not to be divided equally between the loving and merciful on the one hand and the wrathful and judging on the other. Scripture, according to Barth, never divides predestination equally between election and rejection, between God's loving characteristics and the wrathful ones.

[W]ith its *parallelismus membrorum*, with that balanced assertion of the twofold dealings of God, as a doctrine of double predestination, this is precisely what it is not. The balance gives to the doctrine a neutrality which is almost scientific. It does not differentiate between the divine Yes and the divine No. It does not come down on the side of the divine Yes. On the very same level as the Yes it registers an equally definitive divine No concerning man. In such a form it is inevitable that the No should become much the stronger and ultimately the exclusive note. It is inevitable that the doctrine should in the last resort be understood as *δυσαγγέλιον*, and that as such it should be

repudiated with horror....⁴⁷

He cannot allow for this "fatal parallelism" because of who Barth believes Jesus Christ is -- the electing God and the elect human being. Because we cannot devise a doctrine of election based on an understanding of God divorced from the revelation in Jesus Christ, we cannot maintain a parallelism between loving/merciful and wrathful/judging. Jesus Christ carries both the divine Yes and the divine No.

Is then Jesus Christ only the bearer of the divine Yes to humanity? Is he that without at the same time being the bearer of the divine No? Is he -- and he alone -- not also the divine judge to the left? Then how did we come to speak of a divine rejection then from the knowledge of Jesus Christ?⁴⁸

This necessarily points us to who Barth believes Jesus Christ is for us in election, and we will turn to that in the next section.

Barth adds, however, that one cannot speak of predestination without acknowledging that election and rejection stand in a hierarchical relationship to one another, that at the most fundamental level they are not equal; and also at this fundamental level the supremacy of one must be stressed far more,

so radically that the Gospel enclosed and proclaimed even in this doctrine is introduced and revealed as the tenor of the whole, so that in some way or other the Word of the free grace of God stands out even at this point as the dominating theme and the specific meaning of the whole utterance.⁴⁹

To show that election is truly an election of grace, Barth goes about discussing the three elements common to all conceptions of predestination, the freedom, mystery and righteousness of the election of grace. But these are not absolute concepts. They cannot be described as characteristics of God without first speaking of the God

we know in Jesus Christ.

These concepts are important, indeed vital. But in speaking about election, we are speaking about the primal act of God, and we must let this primal act of God explain these conceptions, these concepts.⁵⁰

Barth reminds his readers that any idea of an ultimate freedom of choice is very close to caprice, and thus the righteousness of God is simply assertion. God is only seen as a tyrant.⁵¹ Over against this,

we must take as our starting-point the fact that this divine choice or election is the decision of the divine will which was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and which had as its goal the sending of the Son of God. As such, it has always in God Himself, as a spontaneous *opus internum ad extra* of the trinitarian God, and to that extent originally and properly, the character of grace. Its freedom is indeed divine and therefore absolute. It is not, however, an abstract freedom as such, but the freedom of the One who loves in freedom. It is He Himself, and not an essence of the freedom of choice, or of free choice, who is the divine Subject of the electing which takes place at this point.⁵²

The only place to see election is in this love of God in Jesus Christ. To begin anywhere else would simply be unchristian, and falling prey to forces which harm us.

But what about election? Barth stresses one thing. In election "God is for us."⁵³ God is for the world, not against it. God has decided to act on behalf of the world. God moves towards the world and not away from it.

In our teaching concerning the election we must always bring in the fact, definitely and basically and as the meaning and substance of all our assertions, that of and from Himself God has decided for this loftiest and most radical movement towards His creation, ordaining and constituting Himself its Friend and Benefactor.⁵⁴

Election is the Yes to creation pronounced by God, opposing any other message, "e.g., the message of the blind election of fate, or of the

supposedly most enlightened election of our own judgment."⁵¹ Thus even in the pit, even in the abyss, when human beings try to stress the eternal non-willing of God, Barth can say that the creature is "still in the hands of God."⁵² It is not left alone nor has it been thrown into the abyss by God. But God does not allow the creature to be shut off in the abyss.

God is and God remains the One who has decided for the creature and not against it. It is by love itself that the creature is confounded. Even there, in the midst of hell, when it thinks of God and His election it can think only of the love and grace of God.⁵³

It is now possible to view those three elements common to all conceptions of God in a new way. The freedom of God is God's Yes to our No. "Grace is the Nevertheless of the divine love to the creature. The election consists in this Nevertheless. It is indeed election. It is indeed grace, and for that reason it is free."⁵⁴

This freedom also means the creature is free.

That he is elected by the grace of God means also, then, that he too becomes free: free from the threat of the accusation laid against him, free from the curse of his own proven guilt, free from the bondage in which the curse works itself out, free from death, in which its end is finally attained; free for the thankfulness which he can never again deny to God now that his ingratitude has been passed over, free for the service of which he is now made worthy without any merit of his own, free for a joy which only now can live again and which is unfathomable in its depths.⁵⁵

We will take this up again in a later section.

In the face of the mystery of God, human beings can only be silent, listen and obey. There is no choice. We cannot question God about God's decision of election. But this means

[w]e are not summoned to an active demonstration of our own powers. We are summoned to live in the power of His grace. But to that we are summoned, being confronted by the omnipotent and unsearchable Therefore of God, which in its unsearchability both cuts off our retreat and drives us

forward. Drives us forward: for no longer can we sustain ourselves with anything but the positive meaning and purpose of the will of God, in the power of which we are saved and ought to live, to whose pre-determination our own self-determination is subject. Everything else is the old past of which we can never again lay hold. The mystery of grace is the middle-point in our lives, divisive and disturbing.⁶⁰

In God's righteousness, God indeed judges the creature. God sets things right. This means that human beings are rightly not to be elected, that of our own merit we have nothing to say. But the righteousness of God means that God sees our inability and decides in our favour.

The righteousness of God in His election means, then, that as a righteous Judge God perceives and estimates as such the lost case of the creature, and that in spite of its opposition He gives sentence in its favour, fashioning for it His own righteousness. It means that God does not acquiesce in the creature's self-destruction as its own enemy. He sees to it that His own prior claim on the creature, and its own true claim to live, is not rendered null and void.⁶¹

The fact that God is a God in relationship, that election and reprobation are not equal, and that God's claim of the creature is prior to the creature's self-destruction has consequences for the doctrine of providence. As we shall see in Chapters 6 and 7, providence will take on a different character when preceded by an election that has within it a relationship through Jesus Christ.

B. Jesus Christ and Election

1. JESUS CHRIST: ELECTING AND ELECTED

Between God and humanity there stands Jesus Christ, the one who is both true God and true humanity. Jesus Christ tells us about God, who God is and what God is up to. Jesus Christ is the electing God. Jesus Christ is the one in whom God's plan is fulfilled, the one who

both elects as the Son of God, as part of the eternal Trinity, and is elected as the representative of humanity.

This is the question of the relationship between God and humankind in the same person, Jesus Christ. It is the question of the *logos ensarkos* and *asarkos*, the question of the divine/human person.

In his exegesis of John 1:1-2, Barth argues that the *logos* and Jesus are one and the same, and that this is no different than God's own self. "It is He, Jesus, who is in the beginning with God. It is He who by nature is God. This is what is guaranteed in Jn. 1:1."⁶²

What v. 2 does tell us, with backward reference to v. 1, is that 'the same,' Jesus, is the Word which partakes of the divine essence. What it tells us is that 'the same,' Jesus, was in the beginning because as this same divine Word he belongs legitimately to God. Thus this witness of the Evangelist, this *ὁὗτος ἦν*, answers two of our questions at the same time: Who was in the beginning with God, sharing His divine nature? and: Is it true that there was anyone in the beginning with God, sharing the divine essence? The answer to both questions is that it was He, Jesus.⁶³

Thus, Jesus Christ is who God is, and election becomes, as we saw earlier, the sum of the gospel.

...[I]n the name and person of Jesus Christ we are called upon to recognise the Word of God, the decree of God and the election of God at the beginning of all things, at the beginning of our own being and thinking, at the basis of our faith in the ways and works of God. Or, to put it the other way, in this person we are called upon to recognise the beginning of the Word and decree and election of God, the conclusive and absolute authority in respect of the aim and origin of all things.⁶⁴

Election is based on this mediator, this God-person whom we recognise as the *logos*, the *logos ensarkos*.⁶⁵

This is crucial, for without this knowledge Jesus Christ as human being would not be good news. Jesus Christ is God, and this assertion takes away any notion of a *decretum absolutum*. Jesus Christ makes

specific the nature of God, while a *decretum absolutum* merely speculated and left "blank" this nature.⁶⁶ If this were not true, if Jesus Christ was not the original subject of election, we would be forced to "pass by" him to the Father or the Holy Spirit to find out about election.⁶⁷ We would be left without knowledge of election.

It has been stated that the scriptures do not speak of a God who elects in the Son, but only of the Father, and thus the Father can be said to do the electing, but not the Son.⁶⁸ The problem inherent in this position is that finally it divides God in such a rigorous fashion that not only could the Father do things without the Son and Holy Spirit knowing about it, but one might even take it to the conclusion that the Son and even the Holy Spirit were not present at creation.

If, again, we limit election or do not see election in the Son of God, then we are divorcing election from the second person of the Trinity, from Jesus Christ. Then election becomes a mystery about which we know nothing, or a "hidden decree which we can never recognise as divine and to which we cannot possibly be required or advised to entrust ourselves."⁶⁹ We can only know doubt about this God because we can never be sure about the covenant to which we think we have heard a call. We are left in doubt. Instead, "He is the decree of God behind and above which there can be no earlier or higher decree and beside which there can be no other, since all others serve only the fulfilment of this decree."⁷⁰

Barth makes this the crucial distinction between himself and Calvin.

The electing God of Calvin is a *Deus nudus absconditus*. It is not the *Deus revelatus* who is as such the *Deus*

absconditus, the eternal God. All the dubious features of Calvin's doctrine result from the basic failing that in the last analysis he separates God and Jesus Christ, thinking that what was in the beginning with God must be sought elsewhere than in Jesus Christ. Thus with all his forceful and impressive acknowledgment of the divine election of grace, ultimately he still passes by the grace of God as it has appeared in Jesus Christ.⁷¹

For Barth, the electing God must be seen as the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, or we know nothing of the electing God at all. Election becomes pure speculation. It becomes the election of a Godhead, and, as Barth reminds us,

there is no such thing as a Godhead in itself. Godhead is always the Godhead of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit....There is no such thing as a *decretum absolutum*. There is no such thing as a will of God apart from the will of Jesus Christ....On the contrary, Jesus Christ reveals to us our election as an election which is made by Him, by His will which is also the will of God. He tells us that He Himself is the One who elects us.⁷²

Not only is Jesus Christ the electing God, he is also the elect human being. Tradition has been inclined to say that Christ was simply one of the elect, albeit the first born. Barth, however, emphasizes that a creature cannot atone for humanity. Christ's election as the Creator precedes that of creation. Mostly, however, he says that before all time, Jesus Christ was the divine decision on behalf of the creature. Jesus Christ stands above all creation. Jesus Christ is election itself, "the original and all-inclusive election."⁷³

There are three specific ideas that Barth emphasizes about Jesus Christ being the elect human being. The first is that Jesus Christ is the "beginning of all God's ways and works."⁷⁴ Jesus Christ is how God begins God's relationship with the creature. It is pure grace. Thus, there is no election "before" God's election in Jesus Christ,

because as we saw both in Chapter 4 and earlier in this section, it is Jesus Christ who is in the beginning with God.⁷⁵ Therefore, we look at the Old Testament through New Testament eyes.

Two questions arise from this statement. Who is the man Jesus, i.e., what is the relationship of the man Jesus to the second person of the Trinity?, and what is the function of the Old Testament for Barth? Let us take them one at the time.

In 1956 Barth gave a lecture entitled "The Humanity of God",⁷⁶ in which he attempted to ascertain just what, if anything, was lost in his early emphasis on the radical otherness of God. Was God so "other", so transcendent, that God could not possibly be in relationship to humankind?

To answer this question is to answer our first one. They both require us to look at Barth's understanding of the dual nature of Jesus Christ, not of Jesus Christ as the electing God or the elect human being, but as both together, what Barth called the God-man. It is the question of the *enhypostasis* and *anhypostasis*, the question of whether or how the man Jesus was in the beginning with God.

It is an event of time, that is, it is a question of how the human man, Jesus, could be in the beginning with God, how time and eternity could be bridged. For this Barth uses the term "Mediator", for it is this Mediator who is both divine and human, who takes up both time in the divine and eternity in the human. To explain, let us return to Barth's exegesis of John 1:1-2, where he states that the man Jesus is in the beginning with God.

The mode of being, and being, of a second 'He,' the Logos, is identified with the mode of being and being of the first 'He,' God. Thus the deity of ο θεός is also ascribed to ο λόγος. In saying this, we are at once presupposing that in

view of the definite article 'the Word' ought to be characterised as a 'He' in exactly the same way as 'the God.'⁷⁷

"The force of the threefold ἦν in Jn. 1:1 is more than axiomatic. It points to an eternal happening and to a temporal: to an eternal in the form of time, and to a temporal with the content of eternity."⁷⁸ Thus, "it is He, Jesus, who is in the beginning with God. It is He who by nature is God. This is what is guaranteed in Jn. 1:1."⁷⁹ As was stated earlier, there is no λόγος ἀσαφής.

This is not to say, however, that there is a projection into eternity.⁸⁰ "In Jn. 1:1 the reference is very clear: ὁ λόγος is unmistakably substituted for Jesus. His is the place which the predicates attributed to the Logos are meant at once to mark off, to clear and to reserve."⁸¹

It is not that Jesus is projected into eternity, but that God is not God without God's own self-repetition. God is God precisely as God reveals God's self in the incarnation of God's own self. God is God both in time and eternity, and thus is no different in time as God is in eternity, only as veiled as we saw in Chapter 4. Thus, revelation, the Trinity and time coinhere in such a way that Jesus is the second person of the Trinity and yet is not projected into eternity.

Some have sought the ultimate mystery of Predestination in a divine determination of man, which took place in some sort of eternity before and without Jesus Christ. But this eternity would be an empty one, and man would seek in vain to conceive of it as mercy and justice, whereas what was done *antequam mundi iacta essent fundamenta* (Eph. 1,4) is, according to the whole New Testament, undoubtedly identical with what took place in the stable at Bethlehem and on the Cross on Calvary. Eternity is here in time. Calvin's doctrine of Predestination suffers from this error of distinguishing God's decree and the existence of Jesus

Christ....⁸²

The second question is related to the first. What is the relationship between Jesus Christ and the Old Testament? Because Jesus Christ is the second person of the Trinity, because revelation, the Trinity and time coincide, Jesus Christ is present in and through the Old Testament. There was no time when he was not. Therefore, all texts of the Old Testament must be read with this in mind.⁸³

The second idea that Barth emphasizes about Jesus Christ being the elect human being is "the election of the man Jesus is specifically His election to suffering."⁸⁴ This election to suffering God has known from before all time. "The Word became flesh (Jn. 1:14). This formulation of the message of Christmas already includes within itself the message of Good Friday."⁸⁵ "From all eternity judgment has been foreseen -- even in the overflowing of God's inner glory, even in the ineffable condescension of God's embracing of the creature, even in the fulness of self-giving by which God Himself wills to become a creature."⁸⁶ All that is due to the creature Jesus Christ takes on himself. "God...proceed[s] against Himself....For this reason, He is the Lamb slain, and the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. For this reason, the *crucified* Jesus is the 'image of the invisible God.'⁸⁷

Third, Christ's election "includes ours" and "ours is grounded in His."⁸⁸ They are inextricably linked. The election of humanity takes place in Christ's faith,⁸⁹ that is, faith in Christ's faithfulness and steadfastness.

Being elected "in Him," they are elected only to believe in Him, i.e., to love in Him the Son of God who died and rose again for them, to laud in Him the priest and victim of their reconciliation with God, to recognise in Him the

justification of God (which is also their own justification), to honour in Him their Leader and Representative, their Lord and Head, and the kingdom of God which is a kingdom above all other kingdoms. It is as they love Him and laud Him and recognise Him and honour Him in this way that they can have their own life, their rejection being put behind them and beneath them, rejected with His rejection.⁵⁰

2. THE ETERNAL WILL OF GOD IN THE ELECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

Barth's thesis in this section is that Christology must be the starting point even for predestination. He uses this section to discuss four explanations of this statement. Otherwise, if we do not begin with what we know, we simply have a concept of an electing God which our human minds think God ought to be, and a concept of an elected human being which bears little resemblance to reality. If we do not say that "God's eternal will is the election of Jesus Christ", then we will simply have unknowns for the subject and object of predestination. God is purely a supreme being whom we do not know, and the elect person is yet another known.⁵¹

Instead, christology must be our starting point. We cannot use some "general hermeneutical decision"⁵² which human beings may set up. We must see Jesus Christ as the continuity between predestination and christology, indeed, the continuity between all doctrines. We cannot set up our own.⁵³ If Jesus Christ is the one who was, is and is to come, how can predestination be thought about and through without going to the one who was, the one who was in the beginning with God?⁵⁴

Second, predestination precedes time. It is eternal with God, and not subsequent to some divine decree. And another point where Barth wishes to remove himself from Calvin's understanding is that

this predestination which precedes time is revealed, not hidden. It is revealed in Jesus Christ.

If we hold fast the revelation of God as the revelation of His eternal will and good-pleasure, if we acknowledge God's freedom in the revelation in which He has proclaimed and enacted it, then as the beginning of all things with God we find the decree that He Himself in person, in the person of His eternal Son, should give Himself to the son of man, the lost son of man, indeed that He Himself in the person of the eternal Son should be the lost Son of Man. In the beginning with God, i.e., in the resolve of God which precedes the existence, the possibility and the reality of all His creatures, the very first thing is the decree whose realisation means and is Jesus Christ.⁹⁵

This demands that we substitute Jesus Christ for the *decretum absolutum*⁹⁶ which is the nature of the eternal decrees under Calvin. It is God in Christ who embodies election, who is election, and to look elsewhere is unchristian. The *decretum absolutum* only leads to a void and cannot answer our questions. It does not point to God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

Face to face with the absolute decree, if we would pursue the matter further, there remains only, as we have seen, the escape into mysticism or moralism, i.e., a self-chosen salvation, idolatry, the righteousness of works. The only fire which a knowledge of the *decretum absolutum* can kindle -- if it does not extinguish all fires -- is that of religion and not of faith.⁹⁷

Third, in God's eternal election of grace it is God's will to "give Himself for the sake of man as created by Him and fallen from Him."⁹⁸ Barth calls this "a twofold will containing within itself both a Yes and a No."⁹⁹ There is a double predestination, but there is no dual predestination.¹⁰⁰

God is just and God is merciful, and God's justice is made perfect in his mercy. In double predestination God chooses to take on what the creature cannot handle, evil and its consequences. God's No

is taken by God himself. The Son of God becomes the son of man, and by taking on evil gives humanity glory and justification. "By the one decree of self-giving He decreed His own abandonment to rejection and also the wonderful exaltation and endowment of man to existence in covenant with Himself; that man should be enriched and saved and glorified in the living fellowship of that covenant."¹⁰¹ Jesus Christ takes on all that is meant for humanity so that humanity may receive all the benefits. "...God wills to lose in order that man may gain."¹⁰² Barth calls this a "severe self-commitment".¹⁰³ God declares himself guilty and takes on damnation, death and hell.¹⁰⁴

This is the extent to which His election is an election of grace, an election of love, an election to give Himself, an election to empty and abase Himself for the sake of the elect. Judas who betrays Him He elects as an apostle. The sentence of Pilate He elects as a revelation of His judgment on the world. He elects the cross of Golgotha as His kingly throne. He elects the tomb in the garden as the scene of His being as the living God. That is how God loved the world.¹⁰⁵

In stressing a double predestination and denying a dual predestination, Barth points directly to Calvin's mistake: making salvation and damnation equal. Barth allows for no equality of the two that would make God and the devil have equal powers.

If we look at it from the standpoint of the election of Jesus Christ, and if we are consistent in finding the will and choice of God only in this election, then a "love" of God directed equally towards human salvation and human damnation would have to be described as a quite arbitrary construct -- just as arbitrary, in fact, as that which would deny to God all right to a love of this kind.¹⁰⁶

There can be no "bifurcation" of election. There are two elements of salvation and perdition, but God took the perdition side that humanity might know salvation. "It is evident that by an act of renunciation God diverts to man the portion which rightly belongs to Himself."¹⁰⁷

Fourth, and last, Barth says that "because it is identical with the election of Jesus Christ, the eternal will of God is a divine activity in the form of the history, encounter and decision between God and man."¹⁰⁸ The eternal will of God is identical with Jesus Christ and is event. It is no static thing, no divine decree which remains set in concrete until the end of time. It is the divine event in Jesus Christ, "a divine activity", and this takes "the form of the history, encounter and decision" between God and humanity.¹⁰⁹

Thus Jesus Christ defines the history between God and humanity, and it is God's will to live in relationship with humanity. This is seen in predestination. "Each glimpse of predestination that we get, even the very slightest, we can understand only as a challenge and invitation to understand and to conduct ourselves more radically and more seriously as those who are already caught up in this movement."¹¹⁰

It demands a different understanding of history. It cannot be any kind of history. It is the history of God deciding in favour of humanity, God deciding in God's freedom to be with and for humanity. It is seen in Jesus Christ, the electing God and the elect human being.

This requires a different understanding of history. God is not "the prisoner either of Himself or of the historical process once and for all ordained by Him."¹¹¹ God is not "merely playing a game" with humanity.¹¹²

We arrive at [history's] deep meaning from the fact that while the Bible does compare God's overruling will in creation with the will of a potter towards his work, while it does compare it, then, with the supreme will of a workman who plans, it does not compare it with the capricious will of a child at play, although the latter comparison would --

apparently, but only apparently -- be better calculated to bring out the sovereignty of the divine good-pleasure. The sovereignty of God bears no relation whatever to the sovereignty of whim or chance or caprice. On the contrary, we learn from the revelation of this sovereignty that the power of whim and chance and caprice is not a sovereign power. It belongs to the sphere of evil, and evil, as that which is denied and repudiated by God, has only the power of impotence. The sovereignty of God and of God's good-pleasure consists in the fact that it is a sovereignty which orders history, the content of God's eternal will.¹¹³

God is actively involved in and with humanity in Jesus Christ, and this means that "the eternal will of God is a divine activity." It is event, event in the "history, encounter and decision" between God and humanity. It is relationship. It is dialogue. It is God seen in predestination at all times.

Predestination precedes time as a living act in the Spirit, similar to the cloud which went before Israel in the wilderness. It is settled, then, that predestination did indeed happen in the bosom of God before all time, but that for this very reason it happens and happens again before every moment of time. For the election of Jesus Christ is unchanged and unchangeably history. As such it is God's eternal will before all time, and also the eternal will of the living God in time.¹¹⁴

C. The Election of the Community

Having gone step by step through Barth's first two paragraphs on election, it is possible to see this one more generally. In it, Barth emphasizes that individuals have their election in community, the community which is elected in Christ. This community is the mediating element between Jesus and the individual. It mirrors the double predestination of Jesus as both the "crucified Messiah of Israel" and the "risen Lord of the church".¹¹⁵ As the crucified Messiah, as Israel, Jesus represents the judgment of God. As the risen Lord, and the church, Jesus represents the mercy of God. Both are there, and

for that reason it is called a double predestination. It is known in the unity of Jesus Christ.

Next, Barth reflects on the justice and mercy of God from the standpoint of the two communities -- Israel and the church. They exist to serve Jesus Christ, and in so doing Israel points to the judgment of God and the church to the mercy of God.¹¹⁵

Barth, however, will not allow this understanding to be pushed to the point of dividing Israel and the church into the bad people and the good. There is a unity here. He reminds us that the church is older than itself, that it has always existed in Israel, though hidden. "The Church form of the community stands in the same relation to its Israelite form as the resurrection of Jesus to His crucifixion, as God's mercy to God's judgment."¹¹⁷

Likewise, the existence of "Christian Israelites"¹¹⁸ reminds the church that God holds the election of Israel, that the election of Israel and the church is bound together.

It can never by any chance fail to recognise that -- in its Jewish and, above all, its Gentile members -- it is snatched with them from the judgment to which (according to Israel's mission) the whole world as well as Israel is liable, and that it no less than they is called by special mercy to proclaim to the same world (and also to all Israel itself) the victorious mercy of God.¹¹⁹

Barth next presents the community in the form of "the promise of God heard and believed".¹²⁰ Israel's contribution is to hear the word of God addressed to the community. It is to hear God's word of "mercy ruling in His judgment".¹²¹ Although the goal of hearing is believing, the main activity for Israel is to hear the promise of God, and though they may stop before believing, "it cannot alter the fact that even in this rigidity it is the people of Jesus Christ."¹²²

The church, on the other hand, has the specific task of believing and of communicating to the world the good news. "...The church consists in the fact that it secures attention for the promise heard by putting faith in it."¹²³

Faith means putting one's confidence in God's mercy as it is attested to man -- both Jew and Gentile -- by God Himself in His promise. It is a question of the essential, absolute and total confidence which no one assumes on his own but which is founded for every one on the fact that in the awakening of Christ from the dead God has revealed and turned to man His own glory. It is thus a question of the confidence awakened by God in which man -- whether Jew or Gentile -- may rely on God as the One who has made, and does and will make, everything right for him. It is a question of the confidence in which man has Jesus as Lord. The service of the Church is that as it hears the promise it awakens to this faith, lives in this faith and attests this faith to the whole world as the temporal doing of God's good-will with man that prepares for its eternal fulfilment.¹²⁴

In the last section Barth discusses Israel and the church as "the passing and the coming man."¹²⁵ Israel shows the passing one, the gracious judgment on humanity, the death it must serve. The church shows the coming one, the gracious mercy on humanity, the life it now has. This is the "twofold form"¹²⁶ that Jesus has, "a passing and a coming form",¹²⁷ and his community must take this form as well. The passing form is Israel.¹²⁸ The coming form is the church.¹²⁹

Throughout this whole section Barth refers again and again to two central facts: first, that "Israel is the people of the Jews which resists its divine election....But Israel as the Jewish people resisting the divine election is at the same time the secret origin of the church...."¹³⁰ Second, that "the Church is the gathering of Jews and Gentiles called on the ground of its election."¹³¹ The two, although separate, are a unity -- proclaiming the passing and coming

man, proclaiming the rejection and election of Jesus Christ and with him, the community. Although separate, they are unified in Jesus Christ.

D. The Election of the Individual

While maintaining the election of the community in Jesus Christ, Barth now sets out his understanding of the election of the individual. Again, it is contended that first it is the election of Jesus Christ and those in his community in him, but this necessarily leads to a discussion of the individual.

Barth must first of all confront the problem of the individual and the community. Is the community so important that the individual is nothing? No. The community we have seen in the previous section as vital, but the individual is important as well. We are made individuals by God and are important that way too. We must remember, however, that all falls within the election of Jesus Christ.

It is not merely figuratively or incidentally that predestination is the predestination of individual human beings. Certainly the election of Jesus Christ relativises the election of individuals, but it also establishes their election alongside and apart from Him. Their election is not void because it can be real or significant only when included in the election of Jesus Christ. It is, indeed, their election which is at issue in the election of Jesus Christ. It is in order that every man may understand that he has been elected in his authentic individuality that the election of Jesus Christ must be attested and proclaimed to him. ... The *particula veri* of "individualism" is not curtailed but genuinely assured and honoured when we understand the election of the "individual" as the *telos* of the election of the community.¹⁹³²

But what does individuality mean in election? It does not mean the election of nations and families but individuals in them, and because it is the Holy Spirit working in them it gives the individual

"positive meaning."¹³³ This is what gives the individual importance. "From this point of view, the Christian concept of election is more fundamentally 'individualistic' than anything produced by secular individualism."¹³⁴ What is the nature of the person who is elected?

Predestined man (according to the election of Jesus Christ and the community) is he who, in and with God's choice, is not met by honour and approval, but by justification by grace alone, by forgiveness; who is not the object of divine election in virtue of a life which is acceptable and welcome to God, but because God covers, transforms and renews his unworthy and rebellious life; whom the sovereign God (in the sovereignty of His omnipotence and loving-kindness, His constancy and patience) encounters, not with a natural Therefore, but with a miraculous Nevertheless; whom He chooses absolutely for the sake of His own will; whom He makes a partner of His covenant quite apart from and even contrary to his own merit or ability.¹³⁵

The elect person is made so by God. There is no merit or worth of the individual connected with it. In this Barth agrees with Calvin. In fact, it is the person who seeks or is assured of his or her own election by their actions that the negative idea of individual is seen. This person seeks to proclaim their own election because of something they are or have done. They believe their ability proclaims their election. Barth soundly condemns this negative view of individualism as "the essence of man's godlessness."¹³⁶

Yet the election of God is an eternal decision of God to be with and for humanity even in their own godlessness. Human beings can reject God.

In defiance of God and to his [man's] own destruction he may indeed behave and conduct himself as isolated man, and therefore as the man who is rejected by God. He may represent this man. But he has no right to be this man, for in Jesus Christ God has ascribed this to Himself with all that it involves and therefore taken it away from man.¹³⁷

In other words, although God has accepted humanity, human beings can

live as though this were not the case. We may indeed live as though Jesus Christ had not taken on the rejection for us all.¹³⁸

Humanity still lives as if it has not been elected. But it lives its non-election in the promise of election. "The community does not disguise the (impotent) threat of man's rejection, but it confronts him with the (powerful) promise of his election."¹³⁹ In the face of Jesus Christ, how powerful can rejection be? It can hold no threat because the power of Jesus Christ and his election is stronger than any threat of non-election.

Not every one who is elected lives as an elect man. Perhaps he does not yet do so. Perhaps he does so no longer. Perhaps he does so only partially. Perhaps he never does so. In so far as he does not do so yet or any longer, or does so only in part or never, he lives as one rejected in spite of his election. These are possibilities of the godless man as such. And it is the godless man with his negative act and in his distress who is the object of God's gracious choice. The fact that he possesses and realises all these possibilities, and that he lives (preliminarily, subsequently, partially or wholly) the life of a rejected man and under the threat of his actual rejection -- this fact does indeed conflict with his election, but it cannot annul it, because it is not to be sought or found in him, but is grounded in Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁰

This is not said in any diffuse or vague way. On the contrary, it is a direct address to each person.

The hearer or reader can fully realise what we are talking about only when he observes that in this final connexion the whole definitive investigation and exposition of the object of predestination transcends all definition and is transformed into a direct summons to himself: Thou art the man! Thou art the object of predestination in this its final connexion! We are talking about thee, nay -- we are actually talking to thee when we talk about the individual human person in relationship to the election of Jesus Christ and the community!¹⁴¹

Here, Barth goes into the Reformed idea of predestination, and seeks to point out where Calvin and others actually did move towards

this understanding. In the first section Barth speaks of election and faith, reminding us that "the election of the elect is realised in their faith, and, indeed, in their faith in Jesus Christ."¹⁴² Calvin agreed with this. Barth reminds us that "faith is the opening of man for God as brought about by God Himself."¹⁴³ Faith is brought about by God, thus the one with faith may not see him or herself as better or different than one without.

But the believer cannot possibly confront the unbeliever with the suspicion that the latter is perhaps rejected. For he knows who has borne the merited and inevitable rejection of the godless, his own above all. How can he possibly regard others as perhaps rejected merely because he thinks he knows their unbelief and therefore their godlessness? If he does, what becomes of his own faith? What of his own election? We cannot -- essentially -- believe against unbelievers but only for them; in their place, and as we address to them the promise which is to them also.¹⁴⁴

Although Calvin did rely on his experience, as has been stated, even he did not finally throw away those who had been excommunicated. "Even in the worst cases we are to commend them to God."¹⁴⁵

In the second subsection Barth confronts the question whether it is only the elect who are delivered from their original depravity. Barth says that for Calvin the elect are "among the rejected as if rejected",¹⁴⁶ that not until they know their call is it revealed to them that they are rejected. Even after their call, and the knowledge that they are elected, they nevertheless do not forget what it was like to be rejected.

Barth rejects this because it divides the elect and rejected rather than the believing and the godless.

Do we not really have both a continuing distinction and continuing connexion, since believers have every reason to know that apart from the grace of God they not only were but are and always will be ungodly, and as such threatened by the divine rejection, and the ungodly can be regarded only

as those who, standing under the same threat, do not, or do not any longer, hear or believe the promise of their election, and are therefore to be summoned to do so? ... Why did not the tremendous seriousness with which it regarded the plight of man lead it to a recognition how bitter is the rejection (only palely reflected in the plight of man) that Jesus Christ took upon Himself in order that suffering man might not be rejected and perish -- to a recognition how high and deep is the grace in which God has addressed Himself to the godless, how impossible is their ungodliness, how imperatively necessary and how precious, but also how responsible is the faith of those who may recognise and receive this grace, who rejoice in it and treasure it? Why is it that in the very desire to glorify this grace they were so intent on opening up the gulf of this absolute contrast between the "elect" and the "rejected" ungodly? The only reason we can see is that they were not seriously prepared with childlike consistency to understand the grace of God as "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is for this reason that we are compelled at this point to arrive at a different conclusion.¹⁴⁷

In the third subsection he takes up perseverance, and in the fourth he asks the question whether or how we can be assured of our election. While thanking Calvin for moving beyond Augustine and Aquinas, Barth points out that the later Reformers never went far enough in their understanding of perseverance christologically.

Is there a distinction between the elect and the rejected? What makes human beings elect is "God's relationship to them and their relationship to God which is in fact peculiar to themselves...."¹⁴⁸ This means that the elect are called to work in the service of God in the particular era in which they live.¹⁴⁹

With respect to their distinction from other people, they are called by the Holy Spirit to proclamation and faith.

By the free event of proclamation and of faith they are placed in a special situation in relation to others, and in a ministry in which the latter do not stand. This is revealed by the fact that they are silent when others speak; they confess when others deny; they stand when others falter; they adore when others blaspheme; they are joyful when others are sad, and sad when others are joyful; at peace when others are restless, and restless when others are

at peace. They are different because of their calling. In and with the whole community of God, they are strangers among others. In different ways they repeat and reproduce the solitude of Jesus Christ. They are lights in the world because He is the Light of the world. They are His witnesses -- for they are elect in Him and called by Him and to Him in that twofold possibility, the work of the Holy Spirit. The difference between the elect and other men, and therefore their calling, is the execution, the objectively necessary expression of their election. What other expression could there possibly be? How could those whom God has chosen in His Son lack the gift of His Holy Spirit, and thus the twofold possibility of proclamation and faith? Because the election of Jesus Christ is the truth, then the difference of those who are chosen in Him (their calling) is *the* witness to the truth besides which there is no other. There and there alone the truth is testified -- there and there alone it finds expression -- where in and with the election of Jesus Christ the election of man is proclaimed to him, and where he may have assurance of it through faith in Him. ¹⁵⁰

Lest there be too stark a division, however, Barth reminds us that whereas believers "bear witness to the truth"¹⁵¹ and the godless "bear false witness to man's rejection",¹⁵² they are both found in the one man Jesus Christ. There is a "solidarity of the elect and the rejected in the One Jesus Christ...."¹⁵³ Barth also speaks of a "recollection" and an "expectation" on the part of the elect. The elect are to remember that without Jesus Christ they also are part of the rejected. "...[T]he way in which God has loved and summoned them from all eternity, in which He has annulled their threatened rejection, is by making Jesus Christ its bearer."¹⁵⁴ The expectation of the elect is that they know that the rejection of Jesus Christ by the rejected cannot overwhelm the rejection which Jesus himself took on on their behalf. The elect expect the election of the rejected.

A limit is fixed by the fact that the rejected man, who alone and truly takes and bears and bears away the wrath of God, is called Jesus Christ. They can be only potentially rejected. They may indeed conduct themselves as rejected, but even if they deserved it a thousand times they have no power to bring down on themselves a second time the sword of

God's wrath now that it has fallen. They are godless, liars; and they will not escape the rod of divine wrath. But this is also true, in its own way, of the elect. If the latter are not rejected, because of their election as it took place in Jesus Christ; if, although they incur the rod, they do not incur the sword of God; if they are not lost but saved so as by fire, then it is not to be expected of these others, again in view of the election as it has taken place in Jesus Christ, that truly and in the sight of God they are necessarily excluded from this distinction as by their lives they appear to be. ¹⁵⁴⁵

In the final analysis the elect and rejected must be seen together.

The elect are always those whose task it is to attest the positive decree, the *telos* of the divine will, the loving-kindness of God. And the rejected must always accompany them to attest the negative decree, that which God in His omnipotence and holiness and love does not will, and therefore His judgment. But it is always the one will of the one God which both attest. ¹⁵⁴⁶

Barth goes into several exegeses which need to be highlighted.

He agrees with Calvin's exegesis of Leviticus 16.

The meaning and the purpose of the election of Jesus Christ consists, indeed, in His honour and glory as the blameless and spotless lamb, foreordained before the foundation of the world to the shedding of His precious blood (I Pet. 1:19f), to the offering of His life in place of many, to become poor that they might become rich. According to His divine nature, Jesus Christ is the eternal Son who reposed in the bosom of the eternal Father, and who coming thence took our flesh upon Him to be and to offer this sacrifice, for the glory of God and for our salvation, and by taking our place to accomplish our reconciliation to God. But as such and in the accomplishment of this reconciliation He is, necessarily, the Rejected. Like that second goat, He must suffer the sin of many to be laid upon Him (and it is the faith of His Church that it can and should lay all its sin upon Him), in order that He may bear it away: out from the camp into the greatest shame (Heb. 13:12f); out into the darkness, the nothingness from which it came and to which alone it belongs; and just as radically away from the many, that it may no longer and never again be to them a burden. For this, in our flesh, according to His human nature, as the Son of David, He must be the Rejected. He must be delivered up by His people to the heathen, descending into Hell, where He can only cry: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" There is, indeed, no man who partakes of the glory of the Lamb foreordained of God. There is no man who

partakes of the shame and abandonment of the one abandoned by men according to the will of God. For how could any man partake of both at the same time? But in Him, who was very God and very man, in perfect unity, the glory and the shame and abandonment were reality, one reality.¹⁵⁷

And later Barth says we must see Christ not only in Abel but in Cain, in Leah as well as Sarah. We must see that Christ takes on both election and rejection, as Barth said, "that second goat."

Barth also goes through a lengthy exegesis of Saul and David, and the question of the Israelite monarchy. He sees the true king of Israel in Jesus Christ.

The King Jesus Christ is the true subject and hero of these stories of the kings. But if this is so, necessarily there can be no equation or counter-balancing of the divine grace and human sin, of the miracles and blessings of God and their necessary limitation, of the present reality of His goodness and faithfulness and the provisional quality of their historical presentation. The latter will be continually overshadowed and crowded into the margin by the former, as in the Old Testament picture of the elect king.¹⁵⁸

For the one will of God is grace for lost sinners in the person of His Son, as the Son of Man delivered up on their behalf. How can He lack glory even in the hell of His humiliation unto death on the cross, and how can He lack shame and contempt even in the radiance of His divinity and His exaltation to the right hand of the Father? His kingdom is complete in both aspects, and that is the secret both of the intrusively positive element in the portrait of Saul and of the intrusively negative element in the portrait of David. They are both one in Him, as in the One who is the subject to whom their stories points -- the one true King of Israel in the same peculiar sequence, in the same internal contradiction which characterises each, and in the same relationship of the overcoming of the one by the other in which they stand to one another in the Old Testament.¹⁵⁹

The Judas story culminates in Barth's interpretation that Jesus overcomes all that Judas stands for: the sin of the world. Judas' "handing over" of Jesus is paralleled with Jesus' willing that he himself be handed over and the Father handing over the Son in the

incarnation.¹⁶⁰ This is paralleled by Paul's executing Christians changing to preaching the Gospel.¹⁶¹

Throughout these exegeses Barth continually stresses that those who are seen as rejected ^{actually} have election in themselves, and those who are seen as elected ^{also} have rejection in ^{themselves.} The two must be seen together, must be seen in the one person, Jesus Christ.

"What is the determination of the elect? to what is he elected?" Barth takes this up in the third section of paragraph 35. He reiterates his primary ideas that the elect are elected in Jesus Christ and are elected in community. But the first new statement in this section is that "the determination of the elect consists in the fact that he allows himself to be loved by God..."¹⁶² But this does not stop here. This "blessedness"¹⁶³ is not simply a receiving but also a service of gratitude, "gratitude for the self-offering of God."¹⁶⁴ "But what is meant by gratitude, and therefore blessedness, and therefore being loved by God? Clearly, participation in the life of God in a human existence and action in which there is a representation and illustration of the glory of God Himself and its work."¹⁶⁵ The elect person is the one called to respond in gratitude, the "one who stands in the service and commission of the gracious God."¹⁶⁶ Thus, the elect is called by the Holy Spirit to work in the service of God, to be "a messenger of God."¹⁶⁷

The third aspect of this determination of the elect Barth addresses one of the crucial elements of predestination: the problem of universalism. While he will not agree to universalism, to the circle of the elect being equal with the circle of humankind (he calls this "historical metaphysics"),¹⁶⁸ neither will he limit God's freedom

to elect whom God wills.

This problem has been highlighted by many, most explicitly by Brunner and Berkouwer. Brunner believed that Barth destroyed the necessary human response to God's revelation in Christ, the fact that human beings, confronted by God's revelation in Christ, are called to decision. He believed that Christ died only for those who believe, and this decision is a deadly serious one.¹⁶⁹

Berkouwer, on the other hand, accused Brunner of Arminianism.¹⁷⁰ For Berkouwer, Barth's mistake was in limiting God's freedom, and that God's holiness meant that some had to be rejected. Thus, Berkouwer retained the double decrees.¹⁷¹

J.D. Bettis says Brunner and Berkouwer have misunderstood Barth's doctrine of predestination.¹⁷² He seeks to show that Barth found a third way through this tangle. Barth's response, according to Bettis, was that the only time humanity is free is in being subjected to God's loving election. He shows that Barth will not divide God's love and justice the way Brunner and Berkouwer state. In Jesus Christ God's love and justice are revealed and divine justice is one aspect of God's love.¹⁷³

On the other hand, Barth does not decide for universalism. Barth stressed that God's freedom is a "freedom from all external considerations",¹⁷⁴ not defined by what it does for humanity. It is not bounded by whether or not humanity is saved or not. It is God's freedom, God's decision. Also, God is love whether or not human beings ever exist or not. We cannot "identify the goodness of God's love with human salvation",¹⁷⁵ and therefore Barth retains reprobation. In both these ways universalism ties God to humanity.

It defines God by what God does for us.

The question remains whether or not Bettis himself has fallen in the trap of misreading Barth. Bettis asks whether or not Barth has attributed enough to the work of Christ. "If it is not to remove the threat of permanent rejection for those who believe, what is the purpose of the crucifixion and resurrection? And if both the man of faith and the man of unfaith live under this threat, what difference is there between them?"¹⁷⁶ Still to need the difference between the person of faith and that of unfaith is still to need to hear Barth's word that it is Jesus Christ who is both the elect and the rejected, both the electing God and the elect human being. It is to still need to hear about the triune God.¹⁷⁷ We recognise that in election "Christ is made known to us as true God, true man, and the God-man."¹⁷⁸ These point us to the the Trinity and to Chalcedon. They point us to God's work in Jesus Christ rather than the human need for division into those who know Christ and those who do not. In the final analysis, Barth wants to point to God and God's work, not to humanity.

The question arises, also, concerning the freedom of the creature. If we do not agree with Brunner that the human response takes on deadly consequences, does the human response have any consequence at all? Does it matter whether humanity hears the word of God and does it?¹⁷⁹

To set the question in such a way is to forget that, in Barth's understanding of the radical and complete otherness of God, human beings can only respond. Human beings cannot demand or accomplish their own election because God is the one who has complete control

over it.

If God has this control, then is there any point in humanity responding with good works? Again, that is to see the question from an all too human and sinful point of view. When faced with the good news in Jesus Christ, there is only one response -- that of gratitude.

There still remains the problem of the fact that human beings know they have choices -- uppermost being the choice to follow Jesus or not. Is that freedom? Is freedom the power of contrary choice? Barth says no. True freedom is in saying yes to Jesus Christ. As we shall see in the next chapter, it is the freedom of obedience, a determined autonomy.

Nevertheless, Barth does not agree to universalism.¹⁸⁰ While Barth explicitly disavows universalism (*apokatastasis*), he equally disavows any limitation on the freedom of God to choose any and all whom God wills. The circle is not fixed and all who are elected are so in Jesus Christ. "The Church will not then preach an *apokatastasis*, nor will it preach a powerless grace of Jesus Christ or a wickedness of men which is too powerful for it. But without any weakening of the contrast, and also without any arbitrary dualism, it will preach the overwhelming power of grace and the weakness of human wickedness in face of it."¹⁸¹ It is to preach the election of grace without making "fatal parallelism" of rejection.¹⁸² It is to be elect and seen in Jesus Christ. It is not hidden.

The true witness to the omnipotent loving-kindness of God, and therefore the reality and revelation of His will, is Jesus Christ alone. It is their function to take up and transmit the voice which they have heard in Him. But what they have heard is not this or that particular; all that they have heard is decisively comprised and comprehended in the fact that they have heard Him. For the heavenly voice which they hear in Him is Himself, and not a higher thing

above or behind Him which is merely transmitted through Him and comes to Him from heaven. He is Himself the reality and revelation of the will of God. He is Himself the kingdom of God which He proclaims. Therefore He is also the good news of that kingdom. As the Son of the Father, He can and may witness to the whole truth, the totality of that which God has to say to man about Himself. Accordingly, those who are elect in and with Him do not have to attest any abstract will or abstract kingdom of God, or to proclaim any abstract Gospel which He has first known, and then communicated to them, detaching them from Himself as independent representatives of this concern. On the contrary, their function is bound to His person. "Ye shall be witnesses unto me" (Ac. 1:8): witness to the witness, who simply witnessed to Himself; witnesses to "the Lamb that was slain" and to nothing else. ¹⁸³

Finally, in the fourth section of this last paragraph on election, Barth concerns himself with "the determination of the rejected." ¹⁸⁴ What does it mean to be and live as one of the rejected? "A 'rejected' man is one who isolates himself from God by resisting his election as it has taken place in Jesus Christ." ¹⁸⁵ It is not that God isolates himself from the rejected person but that the rejected person isolates themselves from God.

What is God's will for this person then? The primary emphasis must be that there are not two wills in God, not one for the elect and one for the rejected, but one will -- the gracious, compassionate will known in God's covenant of the eternal election of grace. "No eternal covenant of wrath corresponds on the one side to the eternal covenant of grace on the other." ¹⁸⁶ With this knowledge Barth says that there can be no separate will of God for the rejected as over against the elect. There is one will of God for both. That means Jesus must take on the rejection of the rejected.

The rejection of mankind is the rejection borne eternally and therefore for all time by Jesus Christ in the power of divine self-giving. It is, therefore, the rejection which is "rejected." Because this is so, the rejected man is from the very outset and in all circumstances quite other than

the elect. He is the man who is *not* willed by the almighty, holy and compassionate God. Because God is wise and patient in His non-willing also, he still exists and is not simply annihilated. But although -- as the object of the divine non-willing -- he exists with the elect, he has no autonomous existence alongside or apart from him. He is not a second person whose nature and determination may be fixed and weighed and explained on their own account, in isolation from the nature and determination of the elect. The most negative possible statement against him is also the great positive statement for him.¹⁸⁷

The rejected person does not stand away from or opposite the elect.

How can he possibly have a life of his own over against the elect? It is only as the object of the divine non-willing that he exists as a rejected man. Only as such does he share as a rejected man in the grace of creation and providence. And as such he also stands -- to the extent that he does not cease to be the man created and sustained by God -- in the sphere of the eternal covenant of divine grace; he is as such surrounded by the election and kingdom of Jesus Christ, and as such confronted by the superiority of the love of God. This love may burn and consume him as a rejected man, as is fitting, but even so it is still to him the almighty, holy and compassionate love of God. And this very love does not permit but debars him from any independent life of his own alongside or apart from the life of the elect.¹⁸⁸

Thus, too, the elect knows the rejected. The elect knows the rejected in his stubborn refusal to hear the good news.

He knows him decisively and supremely in his prototype Jesus Christ; in the person of the One who, Himself blameless, fulfilled His election by taking the place of all the rejected, bearing their rejection. There he stands -- the man who is hostile to God, ungrateful to God, withdrawing from God, repeating sins already forgiven, and therefore enslaved and cursed. ... And as he knows Him in this place and in this way, the conclusion is unavoidable that the existence of the elect involves that of the rejected, with him, but not apart from or alongside him. It is in Jesus Christ, and therefore on the basis of His election, that the elect has the rejected, not in himself, nor yet apart from nor alongside himself, but with himself; taken up with him into his own existence which is not reprobate, but eternally loved and justified and sanctified by God.¹⁸⁹

In reality, the rejected must be taken seriously, as pointing to the

sin which Jesus himself took on, but also must be taken seriously as one for whom Jesus died.

We can take his [the rejected] existence seriously only as it is taken seriously by God Himself. We certainly do not take it seriously if we understand it other than as a shadow which yields and dissolves and dissipates. The shadow is itself sinister and threatening and dangerous and deadly enough. Yet it is this within the limit set for it by God. It is more important, urgent and serious to see its divinely imposed limit than the horror which is peculiar to it within this limit. And this is its divinely imposed limit, and therefore its shadow-quality -- that the rejected man exists in the person of Jesus Christ only in such a way that he is assumed into His being as the elect and beloved of God; only in refutation, conquest and removal by Him; only in such sort that as he is accepted and received by Him he is transformed, being put to death as the rejected and raised to his proper life as the elect, holy, justified and blessed. Because Jesus Christ takes his place, He takes from him the right and possibility of his own independent being and gives him His own being. With Jesus Christ the rejected can only *have been* rejected. He cannot *be* rejected any more. Between him and an independent existence of his own as rejected, there stands the death which Jesus Christ has suffered in his place, and the resurrection by which Jesus Christ has opened up for him His own place as elect. 190

Throughout these important sections on predestination, Barth has backed up his doctrine of election with biblical exegesis. He consistently points to the election of the so called "rejected" in spite of the elect. We cannot look at David without Saul, Jacob without Esau, the disciples without Judas. All hold within themselves election and rejection, and even the sinful elements of the "rejected" look paltry compared to that of the elect. "Does not the treachery of Judas compare with Peter's denial in the same way as Saul's ritual offences compare with David's adultery? ... [D]oes not the rejected seem to be a lesser sinner than the elect?" 191

It is this quality that helps to focus Barth's attention to the idea that all the rejections come down to the one man Jesus Christ.

When Israel is elected and then rejected, when a remnant is called to remain through all of God's anger towards them, the final remnant is Jesus Christ. Thus, again, Christ become THE REJECTED as well as THE ELECT. Christ takes on both -- Good Friday and Easter.

Between them both, between Judas and Paul, stands Jesus Christ -- as, according Lk. 23:33, He hung on the cross between the two malefactors who were crucified with Him; and the rejection of Judas is the rejection which Jesus Christ has borne, just as the election of Paul is in the first place His election.¹⁹²

And we are left with proclaiming this word. That what Christ has borne on the cross he has done for us all. We cannot take from God election or rejection, but look solely to Jesus Christ, Good Friday and Easter.

Jesus Christ, electing and elected, will decisively require a reform of the doctrine of providence. Providence is not derived from the knowledge of God the Creator, but revealed in the election of Christ. What kind of providence is this? To this we now turn.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER 5

¹II/2/x.

²Herbert Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth: an Introduction*, Duckworth, London, 1964, p. 105.

³Colin Gunton, "Barth, the Trinity and Human Freedom", *Theology Today*, p. 319.

⁴II/2/76.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁸It will be seen that perhaps P.K. Jewett does not realise that although Barth has not solved the problem, the problem is not supposed to be solved in the way Jewett expects. (P.K. Jewett, *Election and Predestination*, Wm. B. Eerdmanns Publ. Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1985, cf. p. 23.)

⁹"For in the beginning, in His primal decision, in Jesus Christ, at the place where alone He can be known as God, where alone He can be known at all, known as the *Deus ipse* which He is still even in His permitting of sin and the devil, even in the terrors of death and hell, God is gracious and not ungracious. To know Him always means to know the gracious God, even in sin and death, even under the dominion of the devil, even in the abyss of hell. And conversely, where can there be any true or serious knowledge of sin and the devil, of death and hell, if there is not also a knowledge of the gracious God? But, above all, the blessings and triumphs of His work as Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer do not constitute any exception to this general rule. For except with grace, and through grace, and to the glory of grace, there can be no rejoicing and praise of creation, no receiving of the Holy Spirit and of the enlightenment and guidance of the Holy Spirit, no glory of saints and angels in the consummation of His kingdom, no height and no depth. Church doctrine must speak not only of God Himself, but also of all His ways and works, of all the ways and works of God. But in so doing it must be aware that in their very origin these ways and works have been determined, and at all times and in all places it must make mention of their determination. It must never speak as though it had to do with someone other than the gracious God. It must always give glory to God and bear witness to God as the gracious God. But the gracious God is the One who is God in the beginning, and therefore in the self-determination which is the specific concern of the doctrine of election. This doctrine is the basic witness to the fact that the gracious God is the beginning of all the ways and works of God. It defines grace as the starting-point for all reflection and utterance, the common denominator which should never be omitted in any statements which follow, and which should, if

possible, be asserted in some form in these statements. The specific function of the doctrine is, in fact, to bear this basic witness." II/2/92-3.

¹⁰Barth's exegesis of scripture has been called "typological". D.F. Ford defines this: "The mark of typology is that the literal meaning or historical reality *both* is itself *and* at the same time points to another event or person of fuller meaning. In biblical exegesis its fundamental presupposition is the providence of God: that God does have a design, that the correspondences between various stages of the biblical history are not random but providential, and that God has the freedom to use the account of one event or person or history to point to the meaning of another." (p. 65) He goes on to say that "Barth sharpens this belief in providence into a doctrine of election inclusive of providence." (p. 65) This means that, far from there being a discussion of general and special providence, for Barth there is really no such thing as general providence. Providence will be seen from the point of view of special providence which might also be called the election of Jesus Christ. (cf. also p. 64) (D.F. Ford, "Barth's Interpretation of the Bible", *Karl Barth: Studies of his Theological Method*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1979.)

¹¹II/2/34.

¹²I/2/869.

¹³II/2/37.

¹⁴"Ought our observation and judgment in regard to the external and internal relationship of men to the Gospel really to force us to the position where we may recognise in this distinction between men the divine decision of the election of grace to which the Bible testifies?" *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 40. Niesel, too, saw that Calvin's doctrine was based, in part at least, on his own experience. "...Calvin's point of departure is the observed fact that the Word of God is not everywhere preached, and that where it is preached it does not always fall on the same ground. In view of these facts of experience Calvin accepts the witness of Holy Scripture that the divisions brought about by the declaration of the Word to man are grounded in ultimate divine determinations." (W. Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, Lutterworth Press, London, 1956, p. 168.) Thus, Calvin added his experience of those who believe and those who do not to his understanding of scripture and Jesus Christ and buttressed his argument for double predestination. Niesel, therefore, has maintained an understanding of Calvin's "theology of revelation" (p. 181) which does not take into account Niesel's own realisation that Calvin built his theology on more than revelation.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹"According to Scripture, the divine election of grace is an activity of God which has a definite goal and limit. Its direct and proper object is not individuals generally, but one individual -- and only in Him the people called and united by Him, and only in that people individuals in general in their private relationships with God. It is only in that one man that a human determination corresponds to the divine determining....It is not right, therefore, to take it as self-evident, as has so frequently been the case, that the doctrine of predestination may be understood and presented as the first and final word of a general anthropology. On the contrary, it is right and necessary to get back from things supposedly self-evident to the true sources, the self-revelation of God and the testimony of Holy Scripture, and to discover the definite form in which the electing God encounters and confronts humanity as a whole, and in which humanity also confronts and encounters the electing God." *Ibid.*, pp. 43-4.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 45.

²¹*Ibid.*, pp. 50-1.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 50. "God does rule. Yet it is not the fact that He rules that makes Him the divine Ruler, for false gods and idols also rule. The mere fact of ruling with infinite power in an infinite sphere does not make God the divine Ruler, for that is the very thing which He does not do. Infinite power in an infinite sphere is rather the characteristic of the government of ungodly and anti-godly courts. God Himself rules in a definite sphere and with a definite power. What makes Him the divine Ruler is the very fact that His rule is determined and limited: self-determined and self-limited, but determined and limited none the less; and not in the sense that His caprice as such constitutes His divine being and therefore the principle of His world-government, but in such a way that He has concretely determined and limited Himself after the manner of a true king (and not of a tyrant)...." *Ibid.* "The fact that He is not satisfied, but that His inner glory overflows and becomes outward, the fact that He wills the creation, and the man Jesus as the first born of all creation, is grace, sovereign grace, a condescension inconceivably tender." II/2/121.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 52.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 53.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 54.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 62-3.

³⁰"Is it the case, in fact, that behind the pastoral (and in some measure the historico-psychological) truth that God's election meets us and is revealed to us in Jesus Christ, there stands a higher truth which, for the sake of prudence and charity, must be withdrawn from the practical usage of the Church, a truth which cannot be denied or entirely suppressed, but which is so dangerous that it must be covered over and kept out of the reach of the curious like a kind of poison? Is it the case that, according to this higher and dangerous truth concealed for practical purposes in the background, while Christ is indeed the medium and instrument of the divine activity at the basis of the election, and to that extent He is the revelation of the election by which factually we must hold fast, yet the electing God Himself is not Christ but God the Father, or the triune God, in a decision which precedes the being and will and word of Christ, a hidden God, who as such made, as it were, the actual resolve and decree to save such and such men and to bring them to blessedness, and then later made, as it were, the formal or technical decree and resolve to call the elect and to bring them to that end by means of His Son, by means of His Word and Spirit? Is it the case, then, that in the divine election as such we have to do ultimately, not with a divine decision made in Jesus Christ, but with one which is independent of Jesus Christ and only executed by Him? Is it the case that that decision made in Jesus Christ by which we must hold fast is, in fact, only another and a later and subordinate decision, while the first and true decision of election is to be sought -- or if we follow the pastoral direction had better not be sought -- in the mystery of the self-existent being of God, and of a decree made in the absolute freedom of this divine being?" *Ibid.*, pp. 63-4.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 64.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 65.

³³G.C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, The Paternoster Press, London, 1956, p. 286. Cf. *Institutes* III.24.5.

³⁴Berkouwer, p. 286.

³⁵*Institutes*. III.24.5.

³⁶II/2/66.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 67.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²*Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

⁴³*Ibid.*, pp. 12-13. "This decree, or rather the doctrine of God's election of grace as a whole, is thus glad tidings, pure Gospel, and not, as in Luther's and Calvin's teaching on double predestination, a mixed message of joy and terror, of salvation and damnation. It does not confront us, as in the teaching of the latter, with a *decretum absolutum*, whereby according to the inscrutable will of an absolute God, a *Deus nudus absconditus*, mankind either before the Fall (Supralapsarians) or after the Fall (Infralapsarians) is divided into those who are elected for salvation and those who are rejected and, consequently, are destined to eternal damnation." (Hartwell, *Op. cit.*, p. 106.)

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴⁸K. Barth, "Gottes Gnadenwahl", *Theologische Existenz Heute*, 47, 1936, p. 19, my translation.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁵⁰"We did not form at random the concept of the election of grace. In it we described the choice of God which, preceding all His other choices, is fulfilled in His eternal willing of the existence of the man Jesus and of the people represented in Him. If we are to understand and explain the nature of this primal and basic act of God, we cannot stop, then, at the formal characteristic that it is a choice. We must resist the temptation to absolutise in some degree the concept choosing or electing. We must not interpret the freedom, the mystery and the righteousness of the election of grace merely as the definitions and attributes of a supreme form of electing posited as absolute." *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁵¹*Ibid.*

⁵²*Ibid.*

⁵³*Ibid.*

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷*Ibid.*

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁶²*Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁶⁵"Consequently Barth can speak of election not only as an act of God but as an act from all eternity directed to and including man. 'The specific object of it is the Son of God in his determination as the Son of Man, the pre-existing God-man Jesus Christ, who is as such the eternal basis of the whole divine election.'" (John Thompson, "The Humanity of God in Karl Barth", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 29, 1976, p. 254.)

⁶⁶II/2/103.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁶⁸P.K. Jewett, *Op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁶⁹II/2/107.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, p. 111. "Barth's ultimate objection to the concept of a *decretum absolutum*, in particular to Calvin's teaching on double predestination, is that in the last analysis and contrary to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ it tears God and Jesus Christ asunder and thereby loses sight both of the true nature of God as a loving God and of the election which has actually taken place in Jesus Christ." (Hartwell, *Op. cit.*, pp. 106-7.)

⁷²*Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁷³*Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁷⁵"We have to do with the eternal beginning of all the ways and works of God when we have to do with Jesus Christ -- even in His true humanity. This is not a 'contingent fact of history.' It is the historical event in which there took place in time that which was the purpose and resolve and will of God from all eternity and therefore before the being of all creation, before all time and history, that which is, therefore, above all time and history, and will be after them, so that the being of all creatures and their whole history in time follow this one resolve and will, and were and are and will be referred and related to them." (IV/2/31) "It is the election of grace as the election of Jesus Christ. It is in the reconciliation of the world with God as it took place in time in this One that the depth of

this secret, God's eternal election of grace, is manifested as the beginning of all His works and ways. It is in Him that we see this exchange. For He is both. As the Son of God He is the One who elects man and therefore His own humiliation. As the Son of Man He is the One who is elected by God and therefore to His own exaltation. He is God's eternal, twofold predestination, from which everything else, all God's other purposes and therefore all occurrence, proceed, and in which all things have their norm and end. For what God willed and did, and still wills and does, and is to will and do, is...the execution and revelation of this twofold predestination, and therefore of the election of Jesus Christ, the unfolding of that which is enfolded in this eternal divine decree. He, Jesus Christ, is the One who was and is and will be, of whom and by whom and to whom are all things, very God and very man. (IV/2/32)

⁷⁶ Karl Barth, "The Humanity of God", in *The Humanity of God*, Atlanta, John Knox Press, 1960, pp. 37-65. For this analysis I am indebted also to E. Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, Edinburgh, Scottish Academic Press, 1966, and J. Thompson, "The Humanity of God in the Theology of Karl Barth", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 29, (1976), pp. 249-269.

⁷⁷II/2/96.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁸²K. Barth, *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God According to the Teaching of the Reformation*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1938, p. 78. "But if the being of the man Jesus in the beginning with God is not to be understood in the sense of a projection of a temporal existence into eternity, then we must speak of this temporal existence of Jesus in the sense of the *anhypostasis*...But it is precisely in the eternal decision of God in the sense of the *enhypostasis* that this existence is really *temporal* existence. As he who 'by nature is God', the *man* Jesus is in the beginning with God. In this way he *corresponds* as elected man to be electing God and in oneness with the Son of God 'not in *abstracto*, but in *concreto*, he is Jesus Christ.'" (E. Jüngel, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh, 1966, pp. 81-2.)

⁸³Paul McGlasson, in his recent book *Jesus and Judas: Biblical Exegesis in Barth*, (Scholars Press, Atlanta, Ga., 1991), has shown that "[f]or the most part one must speak of the New Testament 'supplementing' and 'clarifying' the Old Testament witness..." (52-3) There is no denigration of the Old or the New, but there are problems discerning any specific way in which Barth attacks the Christological question, especially in the Old Testament. He goes on to show the two ways he finds that Barth deals with the christological nature of

scripture. These he calls "conceptually" and "personally". "Barth will, on the one hand, interpret a biblical text in the light of Christological concepts, and on the other, in the light of the person/character Jesus Christ." (54).

⁸⁴ II/2/120.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 126-7.

⁹¹ "We may begin with an epistemological observation. Our thesis is that God's eternal will is the election of Jesus Christ. At this point we part company with all previous interpretations of the doctrine of predestination. In these the Subject and object of predestination (the electing God and elected man) are determined ultimately by the fact that both quantities are treated as unknown. We may say that the electing God is a supreme being who disposes freely according to His own omnipotence, righteousness and mercy. We may say that to Him may be ascribed the lordship over all things, and above all the absolute right and absolute power to determine the destiny of man. But when we say that, then ultimately and fundamentally the electing God is an unknown quantity. On the other hand, we may say that elected man is the man who has come under the eternal good-pleasure of God, the man whom from all eternity God has foreordained to fellowship with Himself. But when we say that, then ultimately and fundamentally elected man is also an unknown quantity. At this point obscurity has undoubtedly enveloped the theories of even the most prominent representatives and exponents of the doctrine of predestination. Indeed, in the most consistently developed forms of the dogma we are told openly that on both sides we have to do, necessarily, with a great mystery. In the sharpest contrast to this view our thesis that the eternal will of God is the election of Jesus Christ means that we deny the existence of any such twofold mystery." *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁹³ "We must hold by the fact that the Word which calls us, the Word which forms the content of Scripture, is itself and as such the (in every respect) perfect and insurpassable Word of God, the Word which exhausts and reveals our whole knowledge of God, and from which we must not turn one step, because in itself it is the fulness of all the information that we either need or desire concerning God and man, and the relationship between them, and the ordering of that relationship. At no point, then, and on no pretext, can we afford

either to dispense with, or to be turned aside from, the knowledge of Jesus Christ. And why indeed should we do so at this particular point? We should be in full accord with the majority of those theologians if we were to defend the assertion that what the Bible calls the salvation of man is nothing other than the salvation once for all accomplished by Jesus Christ, or that what the Bible calls the Church is nothing other than the life of the earthly body which has in Jesus Christ its heavenly Head and Subject, or that what the Bible calls our hope can be nothing other than the return of Jesus Christ to the just judgment by which those who believe in Him will go to eternal life. We ask then: When it is a question of the understanding and exposition of what the Bible calls predestination or election, why and on what authority are we suddenly to formulate a statement which leaves out all mention of Jesus Christ?" *Ibid.*, pp. 152-3.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, p. 171.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, p. 168.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, p. 162.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 164-5.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, p. 171.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, p. 173.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, p. 175.

¹⁰⁹This idea of God's being an event is taken up in E. Jüngel's book, *The Doctrine of the Trinity: God's Being is in Becoming*, Scottish Academic Press Ltd., translated in 1976.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 186.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 193.

¹¹²*Ibid.*

¹¹³*Ibid.*

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 191. Colin Gunton takes up the question of time and eternity in his article, "Karl Barth's Doctrine of Election as Part of His Doctrine of God", *Journal of Theological Studies*, 25, 1974. It concerns how Barth can speak of God's eternal will being a divine activity, or how he can speak of the eternal interior of God. He explains is thus: "If God has in fact revealed himself, then he must, in himself, be such that he can reveal himself. What God does, he can do. Actuality implies possibility and, particularly, the freedom to become what he is not, to become man. God is gracious in becoming man: therefore in his innermost being he is the kind of God to whom it is not unnatural to become what he is not. Barth's move, therefore, in the process of his argument, is from time to eternity, and not the reverse. But once the move is made, it is clear that priority in being belongs to the eternal God. History is a sure guide to what God really is; but it is what God really is that makes the temporal history possible at all. Grace is possible because God is gracious....In simple summary, it might be said that that the Word became flesh is our justification for saying that before all time God decided freely to be our God. The doctrine of election is then the rational exposition of the characteristic triune event." (pp. 387-8) This is one explanation of election and the triune God. It is important to see that in Barth's theology they do indeed go together. To go any deeper, however, is beyond the scope of the dissertation.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 198.

¹¹⁶"If in faith in Jesus Christ Israel is obedient to its election, if it is given to it to come to the Church and rise to life again in it, to attain in it the goal of its determination, the special contribution which it will make within the whole of the community to the work of the community will be this. It will express the awareness of the human basis of the divine suffering and therefore the recognition of man's incapacity, unwillingness and unworthiness with regard to the divine mercy purposed in Jesus Christ; the recognition of the justice of the judgment passed on man in the suffering of Jesus Christ." II/2/206

"The Church form of the community reveals what God chooses for man when He elects him for communion with Himself in His eternal election of grace. He chooses for man His whole selflessly self-giving love. He chooses out of the treasures of His own nature righteousness and holiness, peace and joy, life and blessedness. He chooses for man His own self as Brother but also as Leader, as Servant but also as Master, as Physician but also King. He therefore chooses for man the reflection of His own glory. He does this by electing flesh and blood from Judah-Israel to be His tabernacle and the Church of Jews and Gentiles to be His sanctuary, to declare to the world His gracious turning. All this happens wholly for our benefit, for our benefit. ...It reveals that the primal, basic decision of God with regard to man is His mercy, the engagement of His heart, and therefore His most intimate and intensive involvement in the latter's existence and condition. It reveals that even God's judgment is sustained and

surrounded by God's mercy, even His severity by His kindness, even His wrath by His love. If the judgment that has overtaken man (according to Israel's commission) forbids us to seek any refuge except in the mercy of God, even more strictly does the mercy of God laying hold of man (according to the Church's commission) forbid us to fear His judgment without loving Him as Judge, without looking for our justification from Him." II/2/210-11.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 211.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 213.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 233.

¹²¹*Ibid.*, p. 234.

¹²²*Ibid.*, p. 236.

¹²³*Ibid.*, p. 237.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 237-8.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 259.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 260.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 260.

¹²⁸"In the destiny of this people, in its continual abandonment, extermination and destruction from its suffering in Egypt to the final fall of Jerusalem and beyond that down to the present day, in the weakness, torment and sickness of this Job, this strangest of God's servants among the peoples -- it has to pay dearly for being God's chosen people -- there is mirrored the radicalism in which God Himself makes real His mercy with man, the enigmatic character of His self-surrender. Matching the depth of this people's need is the depth to which God does not count it too costly to condescend for the sake of His eternal covenant with man. What man's necessary lot is, what it means that sin came into the world and with sin death; but more than that, who and what God is, who takes the part of man in this condition; how complete is His turning towards him -- this is what the community of God in its Israelite form has to declare." II/2/261.

¹²⁹"The Church form of the community reveals the scope of what God wills for man when in His eternal election of grace He elects him for fellowship with Himself. In electing him from all eternity He elects him for eternity. In electing him in grace He makes Himself the Guarantor and Giver of the eternal salvation offered to man. Without ceasing to be God, and without man ceasing to be man, He really invests him with His own glory. This is what is at stake when He espouses Israel's cause, and in Israel the cause of the man Jesus, and in Jesus that of the many from among Jews and Gentiles. Man

elected by God is man made participant by God in eternal salvation. It is this man whom God's community in its perfect, its Church form can reveal. It reveals that even death is surrounded by life, even hell (in all its terrible reality) by the kingdom of the beloved Son of God. If it is futile (according to Israel's commission) to refuse to see and suffer death as a sign of the divine judgment, it is even more futile (according to that of the Church) to reverence and fear death itself instead of rejoicing in the hope of eternal life which is the gracious gift of God's mercy." II/2/265.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 198-9.

¹³¹*Ibid.*, p. 199.

¹³²*Ibid.*, p. 310-11. "The Christian concept of election does not involve this despoiling of the many for the sake of the one. On the contrary, when Jesus Christ is the elected One, the election and the accompanying mystery of individuality and solitude, and with it the freedom and responsibility and the authority and the power of the many, are not abrogated, but definitively confirmed in this Other. He is not the object of the divine election of grace instead of them, but on their behalf. He does not retain for Himself or withhold what He is and possesses as the Elect of God. He does not deal with it as with spoil. But He is what He is, and has what He has, in His revelation and imparting of it to the many." p. 311.

¹³³*Ibid.*, p. 314.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 315.

¹³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 316.

¹³⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 316-7.

¹³⁸"Man can do it and persist in it. He can become a sinner and place himself within the shadow of divine judgment which his powerless representation of the man rejected by God is unable to escape. He does all this. But he cannot reverse or change the eternal decision of God -- by which He regards, considers and wills man, not in his isolation over against Him, but in His Son Jesus. Man can certainly keep on lying (and does so); but he cannot make truth falsehood. He can certainly rebel (he does so); but he can accomplish nothing which abolishes the choice of God. He can certainly flee from God (he does so); but he cannot escape Him. He can certainly hate God and be hateful to God (he does and is so); but he cannot change into its opposite the eternal love of God which triumphs even in His hate. He can certainly give himself to isolation (he does so -- he thinks, wills and behaves godlessly, and is godless); but even in his isolation he must demonstrate that which he wishes to controvert -- the impossibility of playing the "individual" over against God. He may let go of God, but God does not let go of him." *Ibid.*, p. 317.

¹³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 321.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 323.

¹⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 326.

¹⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 327.

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 328.

¹⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 329.

¹⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 340.

¹⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 343.

¹⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 345.

¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 347.

¹⁵²*Ibid.*

¹⁵³*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. 347. "But if this is the case, then in this respect, too, the elect will know and confess themselves to be in solidarity with the godless. The cross of Jesus Christ stands between them, and it is the only hope of both. In the godless, the elect see what they themselves were and are and will be apart from this hope. They see the darkness of the great falsehood fall more broadly and deeply across their own lives than across the lives of others; the lie which Jesus Christ exposes as such, and whose punishment He has borne for us. In the very moment in which, thanks to their calling, they can hear and receive their acquittal, they see themselves as charged with their own as the greatest guilt of all. How else will believers recognise themselves in others if not in that which distinguishes these others from them -- in damnation and distress? How can the man who denies this recognition possess the Holy Spirit? He and he alone possesses the Holy Spirit who knows continually that the grace of Jesus Christ is the only basis, not only of his election, but also of his calling." *Ibid.*, pp. 348-9.

¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 349.

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 353.

¹⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 365.

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 391.

¹⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 392.

¹⁶⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 458-506.

¹⁶¹These examples of Barth's typological exegesis are further scrutinized in McGlasson and Ford.

¹⁶²*Ibid.*, p. 411.

¹⁶³*Ibid.*, p. 412.

¹⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 413.

¹⁶⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 414.

¹⁶⁷*Ibid.*, p. 415.

¹⁶⁸*Ibid.*, p. 417.

¹⁶⁹E. Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God: Dogmatics vol. 1*, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1950, pp. 303-353. Cf. especially p. 351.

¹⁷⁰G.C. Berkouwer, *Op. cit.*, p. 263f.

¹⁷¹P.K. Jewett, too, while making an admirable attempt to do justice to what he considers the human decision, can be said to come down to an Arminian position.

¹⁷²J.D. Bettis, "Is Karl Barth a Universalist?" *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 20, 1967.

¹⁷³*Ibid.*, p. 427.

¹⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 428.

¹⁷⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 428-9.

¹⁷⁶*Ibid.*, p. 433.

¹⁷⁷J. Thompson, "The Humanity of God in the Theology of Karl Barth", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 29, 1976.

¹⁷⁸*Ibid.*, p. 252.

¹⁷⁹Berkouwer also believes Barth has not dealt with this tension between "universal election and human decision." *Op. cit.*, p. 288.

¹⁸⁰"But, again, in grateful recognition of the grace of the divine freedom we cannot venture the opposite statement that there

cannot and will not be this final opening up and enlargement of the circle of election and calling. Neither as the election of Jesus Christ, the election of His community, nor the election of the individual do we know the divine election of grace as anything other than a decision of His loving-kindness. We would be developing an opposing historical metaphysics if we were to try to attribute any limits -- and therefore an end of these frontier-crossings -- to the loving-kindness of God." II/2/418.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 477.

¹⁸² "If we ask about the meaning and direction of the life of the elect, in the light of this centre of all the reality and revelation of election, in the light of the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man, promised according to the Old Testament in Israel's history, and actually born, crucified and risen according to the New Testament, we have to reply that the elect lives as such in so far as he is there on behalf of others, i.e., in so far as it is grounded in him and happens through him that the omnipotent loving-kindness of God is at all events directed and opened up to the world, i.e., to others among those who do not yet recognise it and are not yet grateful for it. ... The New Testament does, of course, also know and describe the life of this man as that of one who is saved and sanctified, expecting and ultimately receiving eternal life. But whereas the Church's doctrine of predestination ends and halts with this definition as in a *cul-de-sac*, and whereas its last word is to the effect that the elect finally "go to heaven" as distinct from the rejected, the biblical view -- in a deeper understanding of what is meant by the clothing of men with God's eternal glory -- opens at this point another door. For as those who expect and finally receive eternal life, as the heirs in faith of eternal glory, the elect are accepted for this employment and placed in this service. They are made witnesses." *Ibid.*, p. 423.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 424-5.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 499.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 450.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 450-1.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 451.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 453.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 480.

PROVIDENCE: THE RESULTS OF ELECTION

Barth's doctrine of the providence of God is Christocentric. Its beginning, middle and end is shaped by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, the centre around which the whole of the doctrine revolves. It is predestination's outward appearance.

The first major aspect of providence is its relationship to predestination and creation. Barth rejects the placement of providence within the doctrine of God, as the medieval scholastics did,¹ and instead affirms the post-Reformation dogmatics decision to place it within the doctrine of creation. He explains this by going back before creation -- to election itself.²

A. From Jesus Christ to Providence

1. THE CONCEPT OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

We saw in Chapter 5 that the eternal election of grace is the result of God's trinitarian being in act. The result of this eternal election of grace is God's covenant of grace. This also proceeds from God's essence and is every bit as eternal as the election of grace. In fact, they are hard to distinguish because the eternal election of grace necessarily elicits an eternal covenant of grace. They simply cannot be divided. Election and covenant are mutually inclusive.

From the eternal election of grace and the covenant of grace which are grounded in the being and will of God comes the external history of the covenant. Specifically, this is the covenant of grace

worked out in human history. This is the story of the world as God has created it, from the creation in Genesis to the present. The history of the covenant is the covenant of grace on stage.

Thus far we have an eternal election of grace, i.e., predestination, and a covenant of grace, both of which are grounded in the being and will of God. From these two, outwardly, comes the external history of the covenant, i.e., history as we know it.

The location or setting for this external history of the covenant is creation itself. Creation is the locus of covenant history, and, if we follow Barth's line of thinking, creation, therefore, proceeds from the covenant of grace. Creation cannot be discussed on philosophical grounds, nor can we use creation to explain other doctrines. Neither can creation be explained by the philosophical argument moving from second to first causes. Creation can be seen only as a result of what has already happened, namely, that God creates because God has already elected. In other words, election is prior to creation. In fact, election is prior to everything we know about and is grounded in the being and will of God.

Creation, however, is a once-for-all event. As Barth says,

The work of creation, the positing of the reality distinct from God, its summoning forth from nothing to appropriate creaturely being, is a once-for-all act, not repeated or repeatable, beginning in and with time and ending in it.³

It is here where we see creation and providence moving in different directions. While creation is the once-for-all event, the setting of the external history of the covenant, providence is concerned with the creature once creation itself is finished. "As distinct from creation, providence is God's knowledge, will and action in His

relation to the creature already made by Him and not to be made again."⁴ In other words, creation happens once, and providence is the care and feeding of the creature forever after.

Barth stresses that providence is already contained within the idea of creation⁵ because of the 'eternal decree' of God's election of grace. This 'eternal election of grace' precedes everything because it is, as it were, within God already. We can make this statement because of the revelation in Jesus Christ. In Christ we know of the 'eternal election of grace' which has already happened already and which is grounded in God's being.

Barth discusses this later on when he criticises "the older theology" for not using the one crucial fact that they had grasped, namely, that to understand the Father and our relationship to him, we must look to the Son. He says:

It is strange that the older theology never thought of deducing from the much quoted John 5:17 that in the question as to the meaning and goal of the ἐργάζεσθαι of God the Father we should look simply, directly and fully at the ἐργάζεσθαι of the Son which is equated with it. It is strange that Colossians 1:17 (τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν) was constantly adduced and yet the lesson was never learned from it that all things not only have their existence (v. 16) but also their consistence, their order and continued existence, their σύστημα (v. 17), in the Son of whom it is said in v. 14 that we have in Him our redemption, the forgiveness of sins, and in v. 15 that He is 'the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.'....Why did not Calvin and others work out that insight that the hand and feet of God, like His heart, are revealed in Christ and Him alone?⁶

Here we come face to face with what Barth considered one of his major breaks with earlier Reformers. He maintained that in order to understand words about God, we must define those words by looking at Christ. In other words, we do not define the ἐργάζεσθαι of John 5:17

by looking at God, whatever we mean by God. Instead we define ἐργάζεσθαι by looking at Christ, who gives us the full understanding of the word, both in life and in death. We define the words of Colossians 1:17-20 by Christ and not by any idea of a divine being we so choose. We define divinity by Christ, not by anything else.

We have seen how providence stems from election, covenant and creation, and how all of these stem from Jesus Christ, the first born of all creation, the elect human being himself. This is Barth's eternal presupposition. As he says, "[Providence] is always a matter of recognition from within outwards, from the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ to all other occurrence, from God's grace to the world of its addressees and recipients."⁷ This is where it all must begin. This is where we gain an understanding of who God is, who human beings are, and how God works in the world - to say nothing of explanations of various Christian doctrines. Only by looking from the cross and resurrection outwards can we begin to think and explicate what are truly Christian doctrines, and as we do, the cross and resurrection correct and transform our merely human understandings.

It is this Christian understanding of providence, the understanding of providence viewed from the cross and resurrection, that motivates Barth. Because he has preceded providence with the election of grace and because there are no hidden aspects to God which we do not know in Jesus Christ, for Barth there is no question of a general and special providence. There is really only special providence - providence seen through the election of Jesus Christ.⁸ Barth's presupposition is always the God we know of in the Old and New Testaments as revealed in Jesus Christ, and with this presupposition,

he now turns to discuss its implications for an actual belief in providence. These he calls the "delimitations" or boundaries for belief in providence.

2. THE CHRISTIAN BELIEF IN PROVIDENCE

"The Christian belief in providence," Barth says, "is faith in the strict sense of the term..."⁹ This "faith in the strict sense" Barth delimits as follows.

First, this faith means "a hearing and receiving of the Word of God,"¹⁰ secondly, "it is simply and directly faith in God Himself, in God as the Lord of His creation watching, willing and working above and in world-occurrence."¹¹ and thirdly, it "is Christian faith, i. e., faith in Christ."¹²

Faith as "a hearing and receiving of the Word of God," means first of all confession. Christian faith begins where our experiences and convictions end, where our trust and obedience give out, where we abandon all self-confidence. It begins where we can only cling to the Word of God.¹³ This is what is meant by confession. It is simply saying who God is and clinging to God's Word even when, as it were, we cannot believe it ourselves. It is, at times, knowing what we do not believe in.

In believing in providence, in other words, Christian faith is not stating how we feel or what what experiences are. It is not stating anything about God, the world, or humanity to explain the faith. Christian faith is simply stating who God is as seen in the Word of God. It is an "objective" statement about the lordship of God. It is "objective," something that simply is, rather than

"subjective," something that might be or could be, or determined by human beings. It is an objective fact. As Barth says:

The matter itself, God's lordship over the history of creaturely being, has spoken in the Word of God as in His revelation to man, and it no longer permits him even hypothetically to think as though it were not present and this history took place under no lordship at all, or that of another. Man has not elected himself, but is elected, to believe in the lordship of God.¹⁴

With this understanding Barth saw one of the major problems of 19th century theology being the primacy of the creature rather than the Creator. The human being became the subject, rather than God. The person's view of things mattered rather than God's lordship which grasps and frees humanity. The goal was the salvation of humankind rather than the glory of God. As a consequence the objective matter was lost, and what remained was the believer's confession of him or herself.¹⁵ Providence was what humanity could do for itself, rather than confessing who God is, and this leads directly to Barth's next delimitation.

Secondly, "the Christian belief in providence is also faith in the strict sense," in that "it is simply and directly faith in God Himself, in God as the Lord of His creation watching, willing and working above and in world-occurrence."¹⁶ If the first delimitation is a confession of who God is and God's lordship over the world, the second is a faith in God watching over and working in creation. Therefore, the specific locus of providence is God. Providence is not "faith in the creature, a cosmic process, or a system."¹⁷ It is simply faith in God and God alone watching and working in and through creation.

Since belief in providence is not a belief in our own ability to

get things done or to order world occurrence or to change the lives of our fellow human beings, Barth therefore stresses the fact that God and creation must be kept separate. "God is not creation," he says.¹⁸ Though we may think that we see either God's specific work or God's own self in creation, Barth emphasises that we cannot make this leap, that creation is not God. What we do see in creation are only what he calls the masks of God. We see, as it were, "in a mirror dimly." (1Cor. 13: 12)

These masks, or in fact, any human conception of what happens in the world, are, however, important. We cannot do without them. Each of us indeed has pictures or images or understandings of what is going on in the world and Barth says these are necessary. What he asks us to do, however, is not to deify them, not to make them our gods or to serve them. For Barth, belief in providence looks at each of these conceptions and reckons with them, but must always refuse to bow down and worship them. Providence must be faith in God and not human beings.

The belief in providence embraces these conceptions, but it also limits them. It reckons with the truth which they contain. It also reckons with the distinctive dynamic with which they do not merely reflect but shape history. But it remains free in face of them. It does not rest on any of them. It cannot do this. For it is faith in God and His dominion and judgment to which all history, even that of the spirit, even that of human conceptions of human history, is wholly subject.¹⁹

"This means...that no human conception of the cosmic process can replace God as the object of the belief in providence."²⁰ It means:

- a) We cannot equate belief in providence with a philosophy of history. We must believe in revelation and not our understanding of history.
- b) A philosophy of history cannot be the object of providence. We

cannot "believe in", for example, the education of the human race (Lessing), the self-development of the spirit and realized in history (Hegel), the clash of classes culminating in the victory of the oppressed (Marx), nor in any others.²¹ "We cannot think that to see them is to see God"²² c) And yet, we may still look at history and see providence -- we may see God's will in definite events. But this is done only by listening and understanding the Word of God, not by possessing a philosophy of history. It must be the Word of God which discloses it. Barth's example is the Old Testament prophets.

What makes them prophets is not that they can rightly perceive and publicly appraise past and present and future history, but that the hand of the Lord seizes them, that He says something to them which in relation to the thoughts of their contemporaries and even their own is always new and strange and unexpected....It is not that they had or acquired a particular insight into the things which happened, but that these things, far from happening by chance or according to an immanent law which man could and should divine, were done by the Lord God....²³

In the last analysis, "it is a matter of the living seeing of the living Lord in the details of history,"²⁴ and as a result, the only place where human beings may truly begin is with Christ. That is where Barth turns next.

Thirdly, "the Christian belief in providence is Christian faith, i.e., faith in Christ."²⁵ The Word of God which Christians believe in is none other than "the Word which became flesh and is called Jesus Christ."²⁶ This is the foundation and beginning point for everything Christians believe, whether we speak about providence or anything else. Jesus Christ, Word made flesh, begins the Christian faith. We cannot talk about providence, creation, or any other doctrine as if this were not our premise. Jesus Christ is the centre of the

Christian faith, and everything else must gravitate around him.

For Barth that means that we cannot talk about providence or God with any other religion or with the world in general as if the revelation in Jesus Christ were something that came later or did not matter. "The Christian belief in God's providence is Christian and...must not be...an extract from what Jews, Turks, pagans and Christians may believe in concert."²⁷ The Christian faith has no common ground from which it may speak to other religions. The revelation in Jesus Christ comes first and to it all other Christian doctrines must reconcile themselves.

So, too, there is no common ground with philosophy. Here he distances himself from Schleiermacher, deism, and anyone else who wishes to say that creation is founded on anything other than Jesus Christ. The Christian doctrine of creation arises out of God's revelation in Christ, not vice versa.

With these three delimitations Barth has shown that faith in providence means confession of who God is, a faith in God watching over and working in creation, and, primarily, a faith in Christ as the centre around which everything else must gravitate. It is Christ who shows us who god is and that God watches over and works in creation. In his third and last section, Barth returns to an actual doctrine of providence and the primacy of election and covenant, and attempts to describe this Christian doctrine, as opposed to discussing faith.

3. THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF PROVIDENCE

In this section on the doctrine of providence, Barth attempts "to describe what is meant by a doctrine of providence which is

Christian...²⁸ and to do so he deals with history. He acknowledges that there appears to be a world history separate from a covenant history, but that although they do not seem to have much in common, in fact, they are similar.

For Barth, history "is the execution of the election of grace resolved and fulfilled by God from all eternity. It is thus the history of the covenant between God and man."²⁹ In other words, history is the action on stage which in fact reveals the covenant that lies backstage. And, in what is perhaps his most significant statement, he says,

As the creation of all the reality distinct from God took place on the basis of this purposed covenant and with a view to its execution, so the meaning of the continued existence of the creature, and therefore the purpose of its history, is that this covenant will and work of God begun in creation should have its course and reach its goal. There is no other meaning or purpose in history. For there is no other God, and in the will of this God there is no other purpose but the election of grace resolved and fulfilled by Him from all eternity.³⁰

There is simply no other meaning to history other than that which was the will of God since before creation -- the election of grace. The election (covenant) of grace is the reason for creation.³¹

Because of this, we know that world history is a part of covenant history. In no way can they be divided as if God cared about one and not the other.

That world history in its totality is the history in which God executes His will of grace must thus be taken to mean that in its totality it belongs to this special [covenant] history; that its lines can have no other starting-point or goal than the one divine will of grace....³²

Barth reiterates that we can never speak about providence as if it were a "common denominator of a doctrine of general world

occurrence."³³ Neither providence nor any other doctrine may be discussed without a prior christological emphasis.

By placing providence with creation, Barth has said two things. First, that because of the eternal covenant of grace the goal for all creation is the relationship between God and humanity. This we see in Jesus Christ -- the true human being. That is the relationship which is God's goal for us all. Second, because of all this, "God is not alone but with the creature, so that the [creature] has existence and continued existence alongside and outside Him."³⁴ In other words, it is because of God's eternal election of grace and God's covenant of grace with us that God chooses to be with and for us, giving us existence alongside and outside God. Because we have been already elected, God ensures our existence. That is providence, that is what we see in Jesus Christ, and that is what Barth goes on to elucidate as he tackles providence in detail.

The title of the paragraph (49) under which Barth expounds his doctrine of providence is called "God the Father as Lord of His Creature." It is important to note that Barth begins with Father to explain Lord, rather than vice versa. "Father" explains "Lord". It serves to highlight the fact that while God is indeed Lord, the only way we can know God is through the Son's relationship with the Father. To relate to God directly we relate to God as Father, as one who has an intimate relationship with us.³⁵ We must acknowledge that fatherhood points to God, that in trying to understand the nature of the providence of God, we are not dealing with an abstract God whom all human beings know by virtue of some inner feeling about a higher power. We are in relationship with the Father of our Lord Jesus

Christ, and as such he is our father. Through Jesus Christ we are made daughters and sons of God.

By necessity this must alter our human understanding of the providence of God. The providence of God is not the eternal wish fulfilment of everything human beings want. God does not come and make everything all right, nor is God a higher power whom we must appease in order to receive God's gifts. God is first of all the Father of Jesus Christ, and we must look to their relationship to see just how the Father relates to us. The doctrine of providence is that spelling out of what God's fatherhood and lordship mean in relationship to the creature, or, as Barth puts it, "...what takes place when God accomplishes what we define as His providential ordering and therefore His fatherly lordship over the creature."³⁶

B. God Alongside Us - I: Election and Preservation

Because of the doctrine of the Word of God and because of God's gracious election seen through the election of Jesus Christ, we know that God stands alongside us, preserving us in our being. God preserves the creature "by upholding and sustaining its individual existence...and by giving to its existence its continuity."³⁷ God does this as the Lord of the covenant of grace. The covenant of grace has not left us simply because we are not dealing with election. It continues. Its outward manifestation is providence, and as God preserves us God does so in God's son.

The power in which He sustains the creature is the mercy with which in His Son Jesus Christ He is revealed and active within creation and in creaturely form. And the purpose in which He sustains creation is the revelation of the lordship of His Son, for whose sake He has given to each creature its

individual being.³⁸

Clearly, the relationship through the son does not leave us. It is the son through whom creatures relate to the Father.

The eternal preservation of the creature is confirmed in God's eternal election. The election which precedes providence guarantees the eternal preservation of the creature. Indeed, we are preserved in God's own eternal election of grace, God's covenant of grace, which goes before us and behind us, always preserving and always sustaining our very being.³⁹ It is not a continuing to create because this would mean a "permanent fluctuation between life and death and life...."⁴⁰ It would be continually being re-created at every moment. Preservation, instead, is "the identity of the creature in its continuity...."⁴¹ It is the identity of the creature as itself from birth to death, in its whole self in time.

The *modus* of divine preservation is vital as it again draws us back to the faithfulness of God in Jesus Christ. The *modus* is that God wills to be faithful to God's covenant. God has elected and created us once we have been elected, and God chooses to be faithful to the covenant of grace which God himself established.

...[W]e understand the *modus* of the divine preservation of the creature to be simply that God willed to be faithful to the eternal election of the creature which He made prior to creation and which He ascribed to it its being and content and existence, and that even when the work of creation was finished He was faithful and will always be faithful to it.⁴²

The election of grace and God's faithfulness is revealed in Jesus Christ, and the one who is trustworthy in Jesus Christ is also the one who is our Father. God's trustworthiness is revealed in Jesus Christ. This is the Father we know in Christ, and is for the sake of Christ.

On this living and trustworthy basis in God Himself, it is decided, and continually decided, that the creature may have permanence and continuity. Without this living and trustworthy basis in God Himself, without the continuity in which God continually abides by His election, by His free but overflowing goodness, and finally, without the election of His grace which is the basis of His goodness, the creature could not and would not continue. But the living and trustworthy basis in God continues, and therefore the creature continues.⁴³

The fact that God preserves us means that we are preserved in time. God sustains us as finite creatures, limited, but sustains us eternally.⁴⁴ "He preserves...[the creature] eternally...but within the limits which correspond to its creaturely existence."⁴⁵

God sustains us but does so "in the context in which He has created it and ordains that it should exist."⁴⁶ God sustains and preserves us in the very context in which God made us. God preserves us in creating us.

Throughout this understanding of providence, Barth is "exegeting" alongsidedness. He continues to point to God's standing alongside, whether in preservation, accompanying or governing. Here, it is especially evident in the fact that the electing God, Jesus Christ, stands alongside and preserves the creature. The creature needs preservation. This has three aspects.

1. MAINTAINED AGAINST NON-EXISTENCE

The creature is maintained over against that which is not, non-existence, which the "Creator did not elect or will...[but] passed over."⁴⁷ Although Barth will later take up that which God passed over, *God and Nothingness*, here he acknowledges that it is the fundamental reason the creature is in need of preservation. Creation lives by the grace of God but is always threatened by that which is

not, that which God did not create, "that which as Creator He passed over."⁴⁸

This non-existent stands on the frontier of the creature but is not creature. It appears to the creature to be "like God, perhaps a second god,"⁴⁹ but is not. It is present "because of the wrath of God."⁵⁰ In creation God said Yes and No, and that to which God said No, God did not create.

...[I]f there were no divine preserving and sustaining, then it would be the holy will of God first to utter a mighty Yes to a reality distinct from Himself, and then immediately to withdraw it by an even more mighty No, thus causing the light to perish as He caused it to arise. We should then have to understand creation, not as the work of a will which is finally gracious even in its wrath, but as that of a will which is finally wrathful even in its grace....But the creature lives by and is dependent upon the fact that in practice this understanding is false, that the holy will of God was not and is not and will not ever be a will of wrath, that although His Yes to creaturely reality is accompanied by a No, He will causes it to be and to continue to be a Yes, not giving to that which He has denied the power to carry through the denial of that which He has affirmed.⁵¹

God's will is finally a will of grace.

It has been suggested that Barth's understanding of the non-existent and preservation means that he sets up a dualism between the non-existent and God.⁵² Because Barth sets up preservation and salvation in the context of the Yes and No of God, that salvation precedes and answers this Yes and No, there is a certain dualism set up between God and non-existence. "There is no room in Barth's thinking for preservation as the sustaining and keeping work of God apart from the idea of *redemption*."⁵³ If redemption did not precede the non-existence, however, then salvation would be purely a reaction, on God's part, to the non-existence. It would make God simply a reactor to the forces on earth. God would not be almighty.

This does bring up, however, the very real question of whether or not Barth gives so much "existence" to the non-existence that he is, in fact, dualistic. While Barth has often been criticised for not taking evil and the non-existence seriously enough, the opposite problem of dualism occasionally raises its head. Both are serious questions which much be put to Barth, and point out one of his weaknesses.⁵⁴

2. GOD'S PRESERVING NOT SELF-EVIDENT

God's preserving, however, is not self-evident. We must, as creatures, acknowledge this wrath, and the question remains whether this "creation of wrath" is a false one. It is false because of the "work and revelation of God in Jesus Christ."⁵⁵ It is not God's will to abandon the creature, to run away when and where it needs God's presence,

because according to the work and revelation of God in Jesus Christ it is not at all the will of God to abandon the creature in its proximity to the non-existent, in its conflict with chaos; to withdraw to the secure height of His own remoteness from contradiction, and then (in consideration perhaps of its greater or lesser merit) to grant or not to grant it His assistance, preserving or not preserving it in its need.⁵⁶

It is God's will to be on behalf of the creature so much that God goes into the depths, into our complete and total situation, and is in solidarity with us.

On the contrary, from all eternity -- that is, in the eternal counsel of His grace as it is effective and revealed in Jesus Christ -- His merciful will was to take up the cause of the creature against the non-existent, not from the safe height of a supreme world-governor, but in the closest possible proximity, with the greatest possible directness, i.e., Himself to become a creature. He placed Himself within the contradiction.⁵⁷

God does this not so that the creature may "come to terms with the non-existent,...but with God's gracious intercession for it. He does so because its destiny is to participate in this work of salvation."⁵⁸ God is not so much interested in the non-existent as in a relationship with God's own creature, not so much interested in the non-existence as in sharing the lives of his creatures.

Here Barth establishes the incontrovertible fact that the complete and total solidarity of God with God's creatures takes place, not only when the creature experiences life, but even before. Even before the creature came upon the scene, God had already identified with his creature. For this reason God wills our history, the history of God's creature with "space and time and permanence."⁵⁹

3. THE CREATURE'S NEED OF PRESERVATION

Why is the creature in need of preservation? Another answer might be to point to the powerlessness of the creature, but again, the focus is not on us but on God.

The need for preservation has less to do with weakness than on the fact that we are called to be a part of God's kingdom just as God made us. We were created exactly as God wanted us to be, and God calls us to be a part of God's plan just as we are. The fact that the creature needs preservation "has its root in the foreordination of the creature to participation in the divine covenant of grace."⁶⁰ We are not made for any other purpose but that of the covenant of grace, and for that purpose we were perfectly made.

Because it has to be present in the divine work of deliverance and liberation, it can therefore be present -- present as a creature -- in all the immeasurable perils in which it cannot preserve or sustain itself. In the light of this foreordination it is not simply a limitation or

humiliation to be present only in this way, and therefore in need. If its destiny is to live of and by the grace of God, and if the fulfilment of this destiny is the unfolding and revealing of the honour and dignity and glory which it attains thereby, then what it attains, what is foreordained for it, is already reflected in its existence and the limitation and need of this existence.⁶¹

This is primarily shown in the fact that the Creator became the creature, taking on all that the creature must endure, must experience, and defeating it. "...[I]n Jesus Christ the situation of the creature was also that of the Creator, and this means that it was a hallowed situation, sanctified and pregnant with promise."⁶² Christ took on our situation and hallowed it, and showed us that the very situation we are in is part of the covenant of grace. Our need for preservation is sanctified.

Hence it is no empty assertion when we say that the future honour and dignity and glory of the creature is reflected in its need. In fact its need means that the creature discovers itself as such at the very place where in Jesus Christ God Himself entered in to save it.⁶³

The creature is exactly who it is supposed to be. It is preserved precisely as the creature made by the Creator, the one who also came and took on the non-existent and liberated the creature for the covenant of grace. While the question of the non-existent is certainly important for Barth's more complete theology, further examination of it is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

In conclusion, the creature continues within the limits given by the Creator, the one who protects it. It cannot exist without limits for that is how it was made. It was made an actual creature within limits and that is how God preserves it.

God preserves it as an actual being, "and therefore not an emanation from the being of God and certainly not from non-being. God

preserves the creature in the reality which is distinct from His own."⁶⁴ Therefore God preserves and upholds the creature's autonomy and freedom, and the nature of preserving these very important attributes will impact the rest of the doctrine of providence.

Barth reiterates two more conclusions to his doctrine of *conservare*. First, that the eternal preservation of the creature "was applied and assured to the creature before creation itself."⁶⁵

[T]his limited creature -- limited in time, but only in time -- He loved and preserved from destruction by Himself becoming man in His Son, by constituting Himself in the Son its Foundation and Deliverer and Head. He took to Himself that transitory speck of dust in order that in that restricted and mean and insignificant setting He might give to the covenant of grace its history. And He gave to that transitory speck temporal duration as the setting of that history.⁶⁶

Secondly, "the eternal preservation of the creature means...that it can continue eternally before Him."⁶⁷ It will not be lost in some pantheistic idea of the universe or be annihilated.

He will not be alone in eternity, but with the creature. He will allow it to partake of His own eternal life. And in this way the creature will continue to be, in its limitation, even in its limited temporal duration....In all the unrest of its being in time it will be enfolded by the rest of God, and in Him it will itself be at rest, just as even now in all its unrest it is hidden and can be at rest in the rest of God. This is the eternal preservation of God. It is not a second preservation side by side with or at the back of the temporal. It is the secret of the temporal.⁶⁸

This is the first section of three whereby Barth elucidates his doctrine of providence. I have chosen to explicate the next two sections under the headings "Lordship and Autonomy" and "Freedom and Relationship" because, irrespective of what subsections one might choose to discuss in the doctrine of providence, it is clear that the more overarching theme concerns the relationship between the lordship

and freedom of the finite and the Infinite. Do they each have freedom and power? If so, how do they relate to one another? Can they co-exist? While the questions of history, evil, salvation and others certainly are discussed under the doctrine of providence, to do so is a lifetime's work and certainly beyond the scope of this dissertation. Instead, I would like to show how Barth orders his doctrine providence, seen through the election of Jesus Christ, with respect to this question of the relationship between lordship and freedom. By so doing, I believe Barth's reform of Calvin's doctrine of providence will become evident.

C. God Alongside Us - II: Lordship and Autonomy

1. INITIAL SUMMARY

If preservation is the first act, the second act of providence is that of divine accompaniment: *concursum*.⁶⁹ We see that God's standing alongside humankind demands a different understanding of lordship and autonomy.

Initially, because of Jesus Christ, accompaniment means that God does not abandon the creature. God always goes with the creature, never leaving it alone as if all that was needed was to create it and then let it take its own course. Instead, God goes with the creature totally. God wills to be with us from all eternity and we know about this through Christ. Barth explains: "When by divine preservation the first creature came to exist in activity, God had already acted, offering His grace, making His mercy in Jesus Christ operative and effective to the creature, revealing the majesty of His beloved Son."⁷⁰ Through Jesus Christ we know that God accompanies us no

matter where we go or what we do. This God decided before creation ever happened.

Secondly, because of Jesus Christ, accompaniment means that God affirms the creature as an autonomous being as well as affirming its autonomous activity. Just as God does not will to be or act alone and as a result preserves creation, so God gives autonomy to the creature's work. God makes a place beside God's self for the activity of the creature, and in so doing gives the creature freedom to be active, just as God is free in God's action. This freedom is paramount. It is precisely because God goes with us that we are free. The ground of our freedom is that God accompanies us.

Barth stresses this freedom by reminding us of the covenant of grace by which God and humanity relate. God is "the Lord of the covenant of grace."⁷¹ The freedom of humankind is given by the Lord of the covenant of grace and if God had not wanted the creature to be free there would have been no use for a covenant of grace. A covenant of grace implies that the Lord is not a tyrant. The Lord wants a relationship which necessitates a covenant of grace with free beings rather than machines. It necessitates a "gracious God" who

acts not only *towards* the creature but also...*with* the creature. His lordship is not despotism. If it were, could it ever have attained its goal by God Himself becoming a creature in His Son, and in that way by His free act of obedience and suffering effecting the liberation of the creature?⁷²

Thirdly, because of Jesus Christ, accompaniment means that God is Lord. "God is the Creator and Sustainer of the creature."⁷³ It can never be other. God is always Lord, always totally different from creation. Yet God is Lord as God accompanies us. Even accompanying

creation, sticking with creation, God is Lord.

God is Lord, and it is God's gift that the creature works alongside God. It could never do so on its own. But this does not mean the creature is a mere toy that the Creator manipulates.

The creature does not belong and is not subject to Him like a puppet or a tool or dead matter--that would certainly not be the lordship of the living God--but in the autonomy in which it was created, in the activity which God made possible for it and permitted it. And this is how God really overrules the creature, in a way which is congruous to and worthy of Him. God rules in and over a world of freedom.⁷⁴

This question of the relationship between the Lord, the "Creator and Sustainer of the creature", and the free and autonomous creature, is the essential question of *concursus*, (and also of the divine ruling, which we shall see later) and which Barth returns to again and again. Here he simply wants to say that the creature is both dependent and free. How that is possible will be discussed throughout the rest of this chapter.

One expression of the tension between the creature's dependence and freedom is Barth's statement, "The free God is always a step in advance of the free creature. The free creature does go of itself, but it can and does only go the same way as the free God."⁷⁵ This is done, however, only when "we...again think of the form in which God is almighty, genuinely and supremely almighty, in Jesus Christ and in the covenant of grace."⁷⁶ In other words, when we define God as Lord, almighty, ruler, Creator and Sustainer, we must not use those words in a vacuum. The only way we can use those words honestly is by looking to Jesus Christ. Christ alone defines Lord, almighty, ruler, Creator and Sustainer. In order to see God, we must first see Christ. He

shows us who God is. Jesus is who God always was.

This understanding, in turn, explains more about the relationship between the accompanying Lord and the free creature. The Lord accompanies the creature and by doing so does not annihilate it.⁷⁷ God loves the creature and expresses this by "accepting solidarity with it."⁷⁸ As a result God reveals God's self as

the true and genuine Lord and King and Law-giver and the sole Ruler of the creature by His own Holy Spirit, who does not strike down but raises up, who does not bind but looses, who does not kill but makes alive.⁷⁹

Therefore, the preceding of the creature by the Creator is confirmed in

the fatherly lordship of the Creator; the childlike obedience of the creature; and the Spirit in whom both take place together....At this point, where we do not see any law but only grace, the fact of God's accompanying can and must be understood as the law of the whole divine co-existence with the creature, as the law of the activity of the divine providence.⁸⁰

2. SCRIPTURE

Lest one believe that Barth bases his statements simply on doctrinal assumptions, it is important to remember that he exegetes scripture throughout the *Church Dogmatics*. In reference to providence and to this particular section two passages are quite interesting.⁸¹

In the Joseph story in Genesis 37ff, Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers, and later becomes Pharaoh's man to distribute all the grain during seven years of famine. At that time, Israel sends ten of his sons to Egypt for food, and it is here that Joseph reveals himself to his brothers (chap.45). In his speech Joseph says to his brothers, "And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and it will keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who

sent me here, but God...." (45:7-8a)

John Skinner, in 1910, noted that "Joseph reassures [the brothers] by pointing out the providential purpose which had overruled their crime for good...." He also pointed to Gen. 50:20, in which Joseph said to his brothers after the death of Jacob, "As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good...."⁸²

Von Rad said that what was most important for the author of Genesis was "God's hand which in all the confusion of human guilt directs everything to a gracious goal....God, not the brothers, 'sent' Joseph here."⁸³ Clearly, included in the self-definition of providence is the assertion that God goes with it, accompanying it along the way.

Barth includes Gen. 45:8 in his list of passages which are often referred to about providence, but does not exegete it. His aim is to discuss what providence is not, which we shall see shortly. Instead, Barth refers to Romans 11:36 in his exegesis. Here he remarks that Petrus Van Mastricht (ca.1698) was correct when he stated that "the $\delta\iota\alpha$ did not define God as the *causa instrumentalis* but indicated the *ipsa operatio* of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as it takes place in the work of providence."⁸⁴ This $\delta\iota\alpha$ does not make God a mere instrument in the inherent causality of the world, as if all that happened had to "pass through" God in order to happen, but instead means that everything that does happen is really and truly the operation of God's own self as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is not a cause among causes or an instrument used to affect anything else. When scripture says all things are "through him", it means all things are of the

operation of God's self, the very being of God. Or, as Barth says later,

Even in relation to what takes place without, to the history of the cosmos as it is distinct but not separate from the history of the community of Jesus Christ, there can thus be no question of the real sway of any principle independent of the God who acts and is revealed in Jesus Christ, whether it be the autonomous rule of man, the overruling of fate or chance or of a freedom or necessity immanent in world-occurrence, or the control of any of the powers, forces or divinities which continually appear with their demands for fear, love, trust, and obedience.⁸⁵

3. WHAT *Concursus* IS NOT

Before going any further, Barth takes considerable time here to clearly state what *concursus* is not. *Concursus*, the free Lord accompanying the free creature, does not mean 1) "an unmoved or passive God and a moved order of creation", 2) "a living, acting Lord and a creation moved by God from without, and therefore passively and without any activity on its own account", 3) God making creaturely action possible and then giving over the control of it, or 4) "an undifferentiated existence of a God-world" where all things could be "equally divine or not divine."⁸⁶ None of these will work. From Barth's perspective they are all excuses which do not take seriously the real question, which is the relationship between divine and human action as seen through scripture.⁸⁷

Accordingly, Barth traces the development of the *concursus*, the fact that the Lutherans wanted to emphasize the relative autonomy of the creature and the Reformers the priority of the divine over the human. He sees this as picking between two of his three initial understandings of *concursus*: that God affirms the creature as autonomous (2), and that God is Lord (3). For Barth, the important

point is to stress neither. There is no need to choose between them.⁸⁸ Instead, they must be kept together.

Barth explains what might happen if either point was not taken in conjunction with the other, for although they may at first seem to be stressing different ideas, he reminds us that they are both protestant (Lutheran and Reformed) and that the most important aspect is to keep these understandings of *concursum* from degenerating into more Roman Catholic viewpoints. On the one hand, autonomy of the creature pressed too far would degenerate into synergism, an emphasis on the co-operation of the human will with divine grace. On the other hand, the lordship of God pressed too far would leave no autonomy for the human creature and make God into a tyrant.

Along with this polemic against Roman Catholicism, the Lutherans and Reformers also had to fight modern and Renaissance philosophy as well as the fatalism of Islam.⁸⁹ The danger for Lutheranism was greater on the Roman Catholic front, while the danger for the Reformers was with modern philosophy, the natural sciences, and Islam.

Given all these difficulties, both Lutherans and Reformed theologians began to re-discover the philosophy of Aristotle and the theology of Aquinas -- all at the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th centuries.⁹⁰ The result was the introduction of the word "cause" to describe the relationship between divine and human action.

Activity means *causare*. Activity is a movement or action which has its aim or object a specific effect. To act means to bring about an effect. The subject of such a *causare* is a *causa*, in English, a "cause," something without which another and second thing either would not be at all, or would not be at this particular point or in this particular way.⁹¹

The problem with this is that we speak as if "cause" was the genus of

which God and the creature are species. That makes the concept of "cause" higher, as it were, than God, to say nothing of the fact that it equates God and the creature: both become equal "causes".⁹²

While the older Reformed theologians said that God is the cause of all causes and that the *causa* of the creature is a secondary one, they also said that as *causa prima*, God co-operates with the operation of *causa secunda*. Barth agrees with this formally, i.e., he believes we can use these terms as long as we know what they mean. Materially, however, it is wrong. It has "missed the relationship between creation and the covenant of grace."⁹³ It spoke of a "general control of God" and of a "neutral and featureless God, an Absolute."⁹⁴ Add to that the fact that it separated world history and salvation history, and the result was that it "lacked Christian content."⁹⁵ It did not have much to do with the Bible.

In addition, by speaking of a *concursum* defined by *causa*, it lacked the safeguards that might have kept it from being misused. Those who might could take it in the direction of synergism or monism.

Barth does give conditions, however, on which the term *causa* can be used, the last of which is most important. Whenever we use the term *causa* or anything related to a causal concept we must fully understand that it describes a relationship between the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ and the creature. That means that we may never speak of the *causa prima* or *causa princeps* without speaking of Jesus Christ as well, i.e., we cannot speak of the first article of the creed without the second.⁹⁶

If this were not the case, if we did not view providence from the point of view of Jesus Christ and the covenant of grace, there would

be three alternatives, none of which are helpful, and all Barth vehemently denounces. *Concursus* is not about acquiescence to destiny or fate (like the Stoics or Moslems), not about the capricious will of a cosmic tyrant (where we relieve ourselves of all responsibility), and not about any limitation of the Creator. God is never controlled by our action for that would render God a helpless spectator.⁹⁷

To make the same point he takes a somewhat different road by assessing what happened to the reformed doctrine of *concursus* after the Heidelberg Catechism of 1563, for although it stated (in questions 26-28) the logical conclusions to *concursus*, it was never clearly explained. The real problem of the reformed theologians' understanding of providence was that they continued to see it in the light of purely formal concepts of God, i.e., God as unmoved, omniscient, and omnipresent. They did not understand the nature of the divine accompanying as revealed in Christ, and as a result two heresies arose: determinism or a Stoic and Islamic resignation, and the reaction against this, synergism. The most famous synergistic reaction to the Reformed idea was Arminianism. Barth himself seeks to avoid both determinism and synergism by stressing the "Christian" nature of the *concursus*, i.e., seeing it from the point of view of Christ. For him it must be grounded in revelation, the revelation in Christ.⁹⁸

The freedom or unfreedom of the creature in its relationship with God invariably leans in one direction or another -- towards the denial of human freedom, which leads to a Stoic and Islamic fatalism, or towards the full autonomy of the human being, which is not so much autonomy as it is the creature making all decisions concerning its

life, which degenerates into synergism. In so doing, Barth has taken up the questions of Chance and Fate, and instead of taking one side or another, he takes neither. Instead, he consistently maintains both the Lordship of God and the freedom/autonomy of the creature as seen through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ defines both and keeps the seemingly paradoxical together and redefines them without using the words Chance and Fate. Barth sees the problem through the lenses of Jesus Christ and does not let the argument decline into questions of "Do we have the power to assert our muscle?" and "I have the ability to choose between good and evil so I must be master of my own fate." He will not dip into the ever-present questions of sinful humanity which demand both the ability to choose and that God take care of and rescue us out of all problems. Barth keeps the constant tension rather than coming down on one side or the other. It is like the eternal tension between anarchy and tyranny, and Barth disallows both. He disallows both because of Jesus Christ. Barth makes theology, and specifically providence, the objective study of the objective act in Christ.

4. *Concursus* DEFINED

To begin to express what *concursus* does mean, Barth explains how several words must be defined. "God" is the one who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit in love. The "will of God" is God's "fatherly" will as seen in Jesus Christ, who was given for all humanity. The "work of God" is "His execution in history of the covenant of grace upon the basis of the decree of grace...."⁹⁹ This means a re-examination of *concursus* completely, with an eye towards a radically different view

of God -- a *concursum* built upon the decree and covenant of grace. To be sure, Barth uses the language of Reformed orthodoxy. He wants to remain in the Reformed tradition. These words, however, take over a new dimension.¹⁰⁰

A. *Praecurrit*

"The activity of God precedes, *praecurrit*, that of the creature."¹⁰¹ This is the first and fundamental element of *concursum*.

Always and everywhere when the creature works, God is there as the One who has already loved it, who has already undertaken to save and glorify it, who in this sense and to this end has already worked even before the creature itself began to work, even before the conditions, and pre-conditions of its working were laid down.¹⁰²

The most important word in that sentence is already. The primary stress is on what God has already done, not what God is doing or will do. First and foremost is what God has already done, "already loved...already saved and glorified...already worked." This is the activity of God which has preceded the creature.

This God has done in God's own freedom and sovereignty. God does not wait on or ask humanity for the power to do these things. God loved, saved, glorified, worked, etc., before we ever appeared on the scene. We can no more change that than we can change the circumstances of our birth. God precedes the creature. God has already set the conditions for us.

The question naturally arises concerning the nature of this "foreordaining" of God,¹⁰³ but Barth reminds us that it is the activity of the "merciful God, who to His own glory and the salvation of the creature has turned to the creature in eternal love."¹⁰⁴ This God is not the first cause, nor is God omnipotent and nothing else.

This God is first of all the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and this God finds God's own "fulfilment", as it were, in our freedom and fulfilment. God seeks our freedom, and it is indeed in the sovereign freedom of God that we find our true freedom.

In Him, and not somewhere near Him, we live and move and have our being - and not on the basis of our self-determination, or of the determination of a field of force within which, or a system of norms under which, we may happen to find ourselves. The only free God, who is the Father of Jesus Christ, is the Creator and basis of all freedom worthy of the name.¹⁰⁵

The "foreordaining" nature of *praecurrit*, the "alreadyness" of God, is found in God's freedom and sovereignty. In this freedom and sovereignty God has already made the decision to be on behalf of humanity, to be for it, with it, and among it. This is the same God who ensures our freedom, true freedom because it is within God, backed, as it were, by God's own sovereign power.

B. *Concurrit*

The second element of *concursus* is *concurrit*, the fact that God's action and human action go hand in hand. It is the accompanying of God.

The fact that God is with us, even with us creatures as such, means that He is so as the sovereign and almighty Lord. It means that His activity determines our activity even to its most intimate depths, even to its most direct origins. It means that always and in all circumstances our activity is under His decision.¹⁰⁶

Barth's conclusion is that divine action and human action are one and the same. They are a single action. This means that "[God] is so present in the activity of the creature, and present with such sovereignty and almighty power, that His own action takes place in and with and over the activity of the creature."¹⁰⁷ This is vital to

Barth because if divine action and human action were somehow separate, God would not be sovereign and the creature would be far too autonomous.

In the question, How does God act?, Barth makes a statement characteristic of his entire theology, which has been noted earlier. By its very nature, Christian theology has to do with Jesus Christ, and all history leads up to and moves from him. It does not have to do with creation and creatures, from whom we infer a supreme being and give the name God. "On the contrary, [Christian theology] first knows the activity of God in a particular cosmic action in which God has made Himself known."¹⁰⁸ This is how we know God and how we make statements about who God is and what God has done. We cannot speak about God by inferring God from creation or its limited knowledge. We cannot speak of a hidden God behind this God in Jesus Christ. Because we know God in Jesus Christ, we know of God's eternal election of grace and God's providence. We can speak about God by referring to what we do know, the person in whom God chose to make God's self known to us, Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁹ In his *Epistle to The Romans*, Barth explains,

The Epistle moves round the theme (1.16,17) that in Christ Jesus the *Deus absconditus* is as such the *Deus revelatus*. This means that the theme of the Epistle to the Romans...can be uttered by human lips only when it is apprehended that the predicate, *Deus revelatus*, has as its subject *Deus absconditus*.¹¹⁰

Lest, however, we begin to believe that because divine action and human action are the same we, as creatures, have no autonomy, Barth again stresses the fact that God creates and establishes the very freedom of the creature in question. It is because God is Lord and Father that God creates, establishes, and upholds the freedom and

autonomy of the creature. It is because God is sovereign that the creature has freedom. In fact, the creature has its true freedom in the sovereign freedom of God.

The One who rules by His Word and Spirit recognises the creature which He rules as a true other, just as He Himself as a Ruler of this type remains a true Other. He takes His creature seriously....¹¹¹

The Lordship of God means the freedom of the creature is confirmed. In God's freedom, God expresses God's solidarity with God's creatures by being sovereign over them and grounding their freedom and autonomy. Humanity sees this explicitly in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in God's express relationship with God's creatures. It is this relationship which points to God's power, omnipotence and lordship.

Barth concludes this section on the *concurrit* by stating specifically the reasons why human freedom is not compromised when the lordship of God is affirmed.¹¹² First, it is because of who God is that we need have no fear for our freedom. God is not a stranger to us or an alien being who seeks to do us harm. God is first and primarily the "Father of Jesus Christ and therefore our beloved Father."¹¹³ God is not father in our limited, human conception of fatherhood, with all its problems, pain, and fallibility. God is father as we see him in relationship to his son, Jesus Christ. That is who God really is as Father, and the one who is really with us, the one who is truly among us. We need not fear him, for this is God truly, the one who wills for us far better than we can will for ourselves.

Secondly, in affirming God's lordship, we would seriously

misunderstand the grace of God if we believed that human thought and action were somehow absorbed into God, or that they disintegrated in favour of the divine. It would be to forget that the grace of God is always the grace of the Lord God, that it always proceeds from the top downward, that it is an activity of God's free grace. It also would be to forget that this action of God is not aimed at the destruction of the creature but instead at its "affirmation, deliverance and glorification....That creature cannot ask for itself anything better than to be ruled absolutely by the divine activity of grace."¹⁴

Thirdly, human freedom cannot be compromised when "the bondage which results from the operation of the Word and Spirit is itself true freedom."¹⁵ Here Barth draws on the trinitarian life of Father, Son and Holy Spirit to point to the freedom which results from the omnipotence of Word and Spirit. This omnipotence guarantees the creature's freedom. Barth might have done well here to have interceded with an exegesis of John 8:32, "...and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (RSV) If we are going to discuss freedom in relationship to the Word and Spirit, surely this verse must be acknowledged.

It remains important to stress that freedom, for Barth, does not mean standing between an "either-or" proposition and having an equal opportunity to say Yes or No to each. Freedom means to will what God wills, to be "determined" by God. It is a "determined freedom."¹⁶ It is a freedom determined in and with Jesus Christ. Any other notion of freedom or "free will" is, in fact, bondage.

The last section, *succurrit*, will best be discussed in the next

section. In it Barth continues to re-define both divine and human freedom, and the concurrent question of the relationship between them.

D. God Alongside Us - III: Freedom and Relationship

From preservation to accompaniment, we now arrive at Barth's final explication of providence -- God's governing or *de gubernatio*. Once again, the fact that Barth's God stands alongside us requires a new understanding of freedom and relationship. Barth is explicating the implications of the particular covenantal relationship between the God who elects us in Jesus Christ and God's self. *De gubernatio* means, first of all, that "God alone rules." There can be no other ruler, no usurper of God's rule. "[God] alone can rule, and ought to rule, and wills to rule; and He alone does so."¹¹⁷

God is also the goal which God has appointed for the creature. Just as the creature proceeded from God (the divine preserving) and is accompanied by God (the divine accompanying), so also the creature will return to God. God has an aim. "God is the meaning of its history."¹¹⁸

Because God alone rules and is the goal, God is transcendent over necessity and freedom. All necessities we see and those we do not see, all the freedom and contingencies we see and those we do not see, God is above them all. God is beyond the antitheses of "necessity and contingency, continuity and discontinuity, law and freedom,"¹¹⁹ though we must live with and among them. Barth says, however, that although God is beyond these antitheses, God rules by them, for out of them arise "creaturely history in time as opposed to a timeless existing."¹²⁰

God is not any of the necessities which we see happening, indeed God's rule is not identical with any event which we see happen according to the "natural laws." God can rule in and through these events, but the events can never be strictly identified as God's rule. God cannot be tied down.

But God is also the God of peace and works in and through "natural" events, i.e., events which look to us to be in the natural course of things. Barth can even say that the revelation that "two and two make four and not five" is dear to God. The important concept to keep in mind is that God can work in and through whatever God chooses, whenever God wants to. God can never be limited by our limited knowledge.

Here again, as in the *concursum*, Barth takes a moment to discuss the relationship between Lutheran and Reformed theologies of the 16th and 17th centuries, and their accusations of one another that they were Epicureans or Stoics. The Reformed theologians were accused of being Stoics because of their adamant refusal to see chance in anything. The Lutherans were accused of being Epicureans because of their insistence on the freedom of human beings. And, just as in the *concursum*, Barth says that there was no need to make this division, for each wanted to accept what the other said as well as their own view.

For both saw that it was a question of the transcendence of God over every immanent necessity or contingency, generalisation or particularisation - and therefore over fate and chance. And what both parties knew that they had to avoid at all costs was a compromising of the divine world-governance by identifying it with a cosmic principle either on the one side or the other.¹²¹

1. THE CONCEPT OF DIVINE RULING

The concept of divine ruling is stated in four ways. First, God actively orders creaturely occurrence. God orders creaturely occurrence, not in the sense that there is permission given, but that God is actively in there doing things; ordering. It is

the active sense of a continuing operation by which an occurrence in time takes place in accordance with a definite plan, and is determined and formed and directed through constantly changing situations and stages....The rule of God is the order of God in this active sense, His ordering of all temporal occurrence.¹²²

Second, God controls creaturely activity both in execution and results.¹²³ God controls everything about the creature - God "controls its independent activity as such."¹²⁴ There is nothing about the creature which remains outside of this control.

The question which must be put to Barth at this point concerns human freedom, and he anticipates it. Along with his stance that God controls everything, he is equally adamant about the fact that the creature is a free and autonomous being. He stands firm with each position, refusing to make it an either/or proposition. He says:

Between the sovereignty of God and the freedom of the creature there is no contradiction. The freedom of its activity does not exclude but includes the fact that it is controlled by God. It is God who limited it by law and necessity and it is God who created it free. And it is also God who in preserving it gave to it a sphere in which to exercise its freedom.¹²⁵

The creature derives its freedom from the divine freedom, and derives its limits. If these limits were not there, human freedom would be that of a second god, and for Barth, to claim that kind of freedom is sin and death.¹²⁶ Freedom, for Barth, has less to do with the ability to make omnipotent choices as it does operating within the limits

imposed by the Creator, limits imposed by an infinite God on a finite creature. In IV/4 and *The Humanity of God*, Barth soundly rejects human freedom as the position of Hercules at the crossroads. Human freedom has nothing to do with the choice of good or evil, or the mere ability to make choices. Human freedom is to be with and for God. Human freedom is not about the Gen. 3:5 understanding that humanity will be like God, knowing good and evil. Human freedom is finite freedom, is to live in, with and under the freedom of God.

The gift of freedom, however, involves more than being offered one option among several....God does not put man into the situation of Hercules at the crossroads. The opposite is true. God frees man from this false situation. He lifts him from appearance to reality. It is true that man's God-given freedom is choice, decision, act. But it is genuine choice; it is genuine decision and act in the right direction.

It would be a strange freedom that would leave man neutral, able equally to choose, decide, and act rightly or wrongly! What kind of power would that be! Man becomes free and is free by choosing, deciding, and determining himself in accordance with the freedom of God.¹²⁷

It is as if Barth wants to remind us that the whole episode in Gen. 3 is ludicrous to the extent that human beings were never made to "be like God." They were made finite by the Infinite. And every time human beings attempt to be "gods", they will fail precisely because they were not made that way.

Third, in the concept of divine ruling, God directs the creature to its goal without invalidating its individuality. God allows for the individuality of every human being, yet also directs everything to the goal which is already set. God "has a unified plan which is in the process of execution, and there is no creature which this plan does not embrace, and which does not in its own place and its own way help forward this plan. But in its own place and its own way."¹²⁸

Each individual is taken into account as God keeps in mind God's goal, and it is God's goal which keeps the individual goals from being relegated to chance or fate. It is God who affirms these goals and steers them all towards God's own goal. Why does God do this?

God controls all things because in and with and by and for all things He wills and actually accomplishes one thing - His own glory as Creator, and in it the justification, deliverance, salvation, and ultimately the glorification of the creature as it realises its particular existence as a means of glorifying the Creator. He gives it this office by subordinating its particular ends to this common end, by allowing it even in the particularity of its activity and effects to have a place in the fulfilment of His own plan.¹²⁹

Fourth and last, just as God orders and controls creation, and directs creaturely occurrence to its goal, so God co-ordinates the activity of creatures with each other. That is to say, creatures are not left on their own in individual isolation whether in relation to God or one another. God creates "a mutual relationship between the individual creatures and creaturely groupings."¹³⁰ God creates individuals to act and re-act to one another, to exist in relationship with others. This co-ordination is also a part of God's ruling. Individuals are brought into a positive relationship with God and with their fellow creatures. The relationship with them becomes one of "giving and receiving."¹³¹ This is an effect of God's rule - for creatures "to serve [their] fellow-creatures, mediating to them continuity and protection and light."¹³² This Barth calls the "horizontal relationship."¹³³

Thus far Barth has considered the nature of the ruling itself, but he now turns to the question which is perhaps prior to that, the nature of this God who rules.

2. WHO IS THE GOD WHO RULES?

The question of the nature of the God who rules has been at the bottom of nearly every subsequent pronouncement of Christian faith. This is what it comes down to: When we do not or cannot believe in God, just who is this God that we cannot believe in?

Barth strikes the older orthodox theology's explanation of God because it was "an idea."¹³⁴ It was an appropriation of the Aristotelian concept of a supreme being, a philosophical concept, not a theological or Christian one. It was "formal and abstract,"¹³⁵ rather than one which took into account the relational character of the God we learn of and know about through Scripture.

The God we are speaking of is the "King of Israel." "The King of Israel is the King of the world."¹³⁶ We know this King of Israel by the words spoken by the king, "I AM."

The King of Israel is the One who according to the witness of the Old and New Testaments spoke the "I am," and in speaking it actualised it for seeing eyes and hearing ears by acts of power within the created cosmos and human history. The concrete name "the King of Israel" covers both the Old Testament and New Testament forms of the spoken and actualised "I am" in which we have to do with the Subject of the divine world-governance.¹³⁷

This King of Israel, this "I AM," is found in Scripture. Through Canaan, Egypt, Jerusalem, etc., we find out who this "I AM" is. Through the events in the Old and New Testaments we find out who this "I AM" is. Through places, events and relationships narrated we find out who the "I AM" is.¹³⁸

Belief or unbelief in the divine world-governance, whether we do or do not apprehend and confess it, is no longer a matter of the right or wrong development of the idea, but of the right or wrong relationship to this reality to which the idea has reference, and therefore to these definite events as according to the equally definite witness of the Old and New Testament Scriptures they took place at definite periods

and in definite places. For the Subject who speaks and actualises the "I am" in these events, the King of Israel, is the God who rules the world.¹³⁹

We know of God because God is King of Israel, the "I AM," and because of the covenant which extends from beginning to end. It is the covenant which calls a people and makes them God's own people. Yet, the story goes, the people themselves do not keep covenant. They do not listen to God's voice, whether it be through the mouth of Moses or the prophets. But God is still king over the people, and though they may break the covenant, God is faithful. God is the one who both judges and preserves, the one who is graceful, the one who preserves a remnant. God is the one who is subject and not object.

This covenant extends into and throughout the New Testament, through the same Lord of the covenant in the Old Testament. This covenant is kept in spite of the faithlessness of Israel. "From this place there has at last come the Israelite who does that at which the whole history of Israel aimed, repaying faithfulness with faithfulness to the King and Lord of the covenant."¹⁴⁰

This covenant, this "I AM", this King of Israel, is the continuity, the controlling centre around which Scripture rotates. It is the thematic thread which weaves its way through every encounter with scripture. This is the nature of the God who rules. This King of Israel, this "I AM", is the one who establishes and is faithful to the covenant, regardless of the response of the people. It is an act of free grace, a covenant of grace, which is faithful to its word. It will not go back on that covenant. This is the nature of the God who rules.

Barth here makes a point crucial to his theology. He states that

we have to look at all the events which we see from the Bible outwards. Instead of viewing world history or our own histories as outside of God or Scripture, we must instead view all history, including our own, from the point of view of Scripture, the point of view of the God we understand through the covenant of grace, the King of Israel, the "I AM." It indeed forces us to see God as the subject rather than the object of our thinking. It makes us see ourselves in relation to God, rather than God in relation to us.

He makes a similar point when he discusses *providentia generalis*, *specialis*, *ordinaria*, and *extraordinaria*. What usually happens is that we view the activity of God, i.e., salvation history, on the one hand and world history on the other. We do this by beginning with world history or "world-occurrence in general", with *providentia generalis*, and only then moving to *providentia specialis*. That makes world history the norm rather than salvation history. Barth wants to reverse the two. Salvation history should be the norm, the place to begin. The history of the covenant and salvation should be the beginning point from which we view everything else - world history, our own histories, etc. From the point of view of salvation history world history takes on a different meaning, a somewhat inferior meaning. That is not to say world history is inferior, only that in relationship to salvation history it must be inferior. It is indeed possible that Calvin would have agreed with this, but he could not back it up because of his ordering of the *Institutes*.

3. RE-EXAMINATION OF DIVINE RULING

If we look first to Scripture to see who the King is rather than

positing God as a king "in general", if we look at the Old and New Testaments rather than at the world to gain an understanding of God, we can go back and look again at the first questions brought up *de gubernatio*.

"Why is it that God rules alone?"¹⁴¹ "It is because He is the One who in His freedom is gracious, and in His grace free; He alone is the One who can elect, and who can confirm His election by giving Himself; He alone is the faithful One who cannot be wearied or thwarted by any unfaithfulness."¹⁴² This is what we see when we look to the Old and New Testaments for our understanding of God, and this is why God rules alone. God alone is faithful. God alone elects by giving God's own self. God alone is free in God's grace. There can be no usurper to this. God alone rules.

"Why is it, and in what sense, that God makes and posits Himself the goal of all creaturely occurrence?"¹⁴³ Why is God Lord of history? The answer is that God is love, and in God's son God is love to another, the creature which needs God's love. God "does not abandon the creature to itself," but directs it to God's own self, God's own love. God does not leave the creature alone but directs it to the one who is for, with, and among all creatures, God's own self.

"Why is it that there belongs to Him that transcendence over the universal antinomies of necessity and contingency, of law and freedom?"¹⁴⁴ The answer is that God is for both law and individuality and freedom. God will never pick one over the other, but grounds all individuality and freedom.

The answer to these questions is really one - the fact that God elected humanity in the election of God's son, the fact that God gave

God's own self and is in solidarity with the creature, the fact that the one who is the King of Israel lived, died, and rose again on behalf of all.

4. RE-EXAMINATION OF THE FOUR CONCEPTS OF DIVINE RULING

Barth returns once more to questions he has already raised, but this time it is back to the concept of divine ruling. He asks first, Why does God order creaturely events? Why is God both the planner and the plan? The answer is that because God wants God's own glory and because God loves the creature,

He has pursued a definite course, executing His eternal will in a temporal history, moving from promise to fulfilment, from Word to act, from grace to judgment, and back to a new and inconceivably greater grace, and yet through it all remaining exactly the same.¹⁴⁵

Barth asks us simply to remember that the King of Israel is the Orderer and order of all that is, even if we cannot understand it. What is important is to know it.

God directs all creaturely activity and subordinates it to God's goal. God also does not suppress any individuality or distinctiveness on the part of the creature. So Barth once again asks the question, How can this be? How can these go on at the same time? On the one hand, God is supreme and everything is subject to God's ordering and commanding and will.

Manifestly God wills and determines and effects all things in this relationship, so that all creaturely activity and effects have to strive wholly and unceasingly towards Him, adjusting themselves to His plans and purposes and executing His commands....¹⁴⁶

On the other hand, all creatures live their own lives, doing and acting as they see fit.

And yet it is still the case that all creaturely activity has its own meaning and determination; that Israel itself and all other peoples live out their own individual history; that all men, the obedient no less than the disobedient, think and speak and act according to the manifest desire of their hearts....¹⁴⁷

To understand this predicament would be a feat indeed, and whether Barth has put it together well enough is open to question. For him, God is almighty and human beings are not chess pieces. God is sovereign and human beings are free. He states clearly, however, that the Bible does not offer us a "solution" to the problem, as if we could open the Bible and find the answer. Instead, the Bible offers us something greater, "the fact of a relationship between the Creator and His creatures, between His freedom and their freedom...."¹⁴⁸ "Relationship" is the key for Barth. God's omnipotence and our freedom have far less to do with a cause and effect arrangement than a relationship and affect correlation. There is no mechanical understanding of the divine-human encounter, but an I-Thou relationship in which God grasps and frees humanity to be whom it was created to be -- the free creature of God. In it God seeks relationship with us.

[I]t is the essence of the freedom for which [the creature] is freed in Jesus Christ that he is not alone, that he is not left to himself, that he is not directed to his own judgment, that he must not be his own lord and master, or exist in himself imprisoned in his own arbitrariness and self-sufficiency. In every form this would be bondage -- the unfreedom of the lost rebel and enemy from which he has been loosed. Freedom means being in a spontaneous and therefore willing agreement with the sovereign freedom of God. This freedom is the being of man, not in himself but in Jesus Christ, in the place and kingdom which have been opened up to us in Him and which already surround us in Him. Because it is not in ourselves but in Jesus Christ that we are free, that we are the covenant-partners and children of God, we need His direction and lordship and therefore the direction and lordship that come to us in Him. And because it is in Him that we are really free, He is Himself our

direction, our guiding into freedom, our awakening to life in that freedom, our guidance to make use of it, our Lord and King, and therefore in this sense too our reconciliation with God, the One who fulfils our conversion to Him.¹⁴⁹

It is this relationship which God offers to God's free creatures. Whether or not that will suffice for many of the creatures remains to be seen (and throughout history has not been enough of an answer), but it is what Barth wants to say.

What does this mean for creatures, both as individuals and as a community? Does this mean that either the individual is wiped out in favour of the whole, or the whole is struck in favour of some sort of individualism? Barth stresses that both the individual and the community are vital and neither is wiped out. "Who ever addressed the community of Christ so consistently as a unity, a body, as Paul did? And yet who but the same Paul saw this body so fully represented in his own apostolic but highly individual person?"¹⁵⁰

It is true that the Bible does not offer us a solution to the technical problem, the question of how the individual and the community co-exist, but Barth says, "it offers us far more. It shows us the fact."¹⁵¹ Scripture shows us that the individual and the community do co-exist, and we can never lose sight of that fact. We can also never lose sight of the fact that precisely because they do co-exist, both collectivism and individualism are ruled out. The individual can never be subsumed in the whole, nor is the individual the only important aspect of reality. The Bible shows us that we must keep them together. Barth refers specifically to the calling of the individuals (and group) in the early Old Testament as well as to the Holy Spirit as the bond that embraces the whole community, making them

one. The individual and the community cannot be separated.

The last point here is simply that God is not a formless, faceless monad, a mere concept. God is concrete as is the divine world-governance. World occurrence is not like the waves of the sea which come and go and have no form. The concrete God, the revealed God, has a revealed purpose that gives form and unity to all events. It is really the King of Israel and the Lord of the covenant. It is "really God in Jesus Christ who is the Subject of this governance."¹⁵² This is concrete. It is not nameless and formless. It is real. As a result,

world-occurrence under the rule of the King of Israel is more than a mass of events which may perhaps be self-directing or may even be directly and uniformly ordered by God but is still lacking in either contour or direction. If the King of Israel rules, then of course this means that each thing and everything takes place in a uniform order as He directs it. But it means more. It means that all occurrence has a definite form.¹⁵³

5. CONSTANT ELEMENTS

In this last section Barth draws upon his earlier insistence that the history of salvation is not only connected with but prior to world history, and seeks to discuss events themselves. Thus, events in world history are not seen as isolated or random but through the eyes of salvation history they are grounded and understood differently. Events now have a direction. They are no longer a diffuse mass but are subject to a structure, a structure seen through Jesus Christ. It is only in the light of Christ that world events are seen as ruled by God.

Barth emphasizes that God's ruling is also hidden, at least for the most part. "In world occurrence it is a question only of the

hiddenness of God and of the ruling power of God."¹⁵⁴ In other words, in world occurrence we have to do with nothing else than those two: the hiddenness and the power of God. We know the power of God and all that God does in world occurrence through the revelation which God has given us, but even this is not yet complete. Even with all the revelation we have received, still, some is hidden.

But from that which the history of the covenant and salvation has already revealed and demonstrated we have seen and learned that the King of Israel, Jesus Christ, is Lord of all. Like all other created things, however, we have not yet seen the way in which He is Lord of all, the extent to which this economy and disposition are executed and revealed in world-occurrence generally. The plan of God and this context are concealed from us even when we venture to acknowledge Him as Lord.¹⁵⁵

This need not upset us, however. Above all the things we do not know, we are always referred back to the Bible and the covenant relationship between God and humanity as seen through Christ.

For to come to know the Lord of all occurrence; to have the revelation of His free grace as the secret of the cosmos which is ruled by Him; to be absolutely certain that there is no such thing as secular history, i.e., history apart from or opposed to this economy; to have the courage and joy and certainty of the knowledge that there is one, this One, who occupies the seat of power; to risk again and again the venture of that confirmation; to give ourselves the consolation and help and support and comfort that are so necessary to us; in a word, to have our eyes opened, and to be able occasionally to see at any rate the traces of this rule -- for all this it is enough if we have the one Bible with its witness to the history of the covenant and salvation, and there is no need to supplement it by looking for a system, or the features of a system, which underlies the context of world-occurrence.¹⁵⁶

There are, however, "certain constant elements"¹⁵⁷ within world occurrence which "stand in a special relationship to the history of the covenant and salvation," which are consistent "signs and witnesses to...God."¹⁵⁸ They are not a second Bible nor a second revelation.

"They are no dearer to God than other creatures."¹⁵⁹ But they do point consistently to that which is greater. They are signs of divine rule in world history.

They affirm that the Ruler and His work are here and now concealed. When we ask concerning His economy and disposition they refer us back to the one source of all true knowledge in the matter, and they also refer us forward to the promised consummation. But as signs and witnesses they do affirm that the One who rules is the Lord of the history and the covenant to which the Bible bears testimony - the King of Israel.... They affirm it according to their special character as constant elements in world-occurrence, as universal and objective historical contexts of this kind.¹⁶⁰

These constant elements are 1) the history of Holy Scripture, 2) the history of the church, 3) the history of the Jews, and 4) the limitation of human life. The history of Scripture, the church, and the Jews have always been regarded as "proofs" of God's government, and in general Barth is no different in his analysis. He takes a somewhat different tact with regard to the history of the Jews, however, and regards them as a problem unlike anything in history. They are not a race in themselves, nor do they have a special language or culture. They are not a people like the French, Italian, or English who have a specific culture and language. They can only be seen from the point of view of God's chosen people, and that itself is a snare which greets them at every turn. They remind the world of the precariousness of existence, the reality that we exist only by God's free grace and not our own achievements, and the fact that God in God's free grace chose them and not anyone else. In short, they irritate the world by their very existence. And, to add fuel to the fire, they produced the one called saviour, Jesus of Nazareth, and refused to acknowledge him. But they cannot be destroyed.

The Jews can be despised and hated and oppressed and persecuted and even assimilated, but they cannot really be touched; they cannot be exterminated; they cannot be destroyed. They are the only people that necessarily continues to exist, with the same certainty as that God is God, and that what He has willed and said and done according to the message of the Bible is not a whim or a jest, but eternally in earnest, and the theme of creaturely occurrence in all ages. The history of the Jews is the embodiment of this theme of all world history.¹⁵¹

It may seem strange that Barth deviates from his other three "histories" when he comes to the last constant element which points to the divine rule in world history, but he does not consider "the limitation of human life" any less a sign of God's government of the world than the other three. The limitation of human life points to the boundaries of human existence, birth and death, and these "reflect the two great acts of God at the beginning and end of all things, the creation and the consummation."¹⁵² These two events point to the fact that we live both in freedom and in limitation, "called to the sphere of spontaneity, and then called away from it..."¹⁵³ These are the brackets around our lives. Within these limits is our autonomy, a finite autonomy, "determined freedom."¹⁵⁴

They also serve to show the once-for-all character of our lives. We are creatures who live once, and we must acknowledge this fact. And in this once-for-all character we also acknowledge "the eternal singleness of God", which points to the fact that in this limitation of human life we have always to do with God.

The fact we live within these limits can also be a sign: the one who limits our lives lets us live before this one in this way.¹⁵⁵ The one who limits us is the one who gives us life, who works on our behalf. Though it is indeed a sign and nothing more,

in the limitation of our life we recognise the faithfulness in which He has pledged Himself to the unfaithful, the supremacy of His grace, the severity and goodness of the King of Israel. In the bracket which encloses us behind and before we recognise the hand of His in which we are held, and in which we are both secure and free because it is the hand which preserves all creatures. ¹⁸⁶

Thus, God wills to be the limited creature's companion. God's rulership, lordship, is defined by companionship, not by tyrannical power, and thus God reveals God's self as Father. Father defines Lord. Everything about God's lordship and sovereignty has to be interpreted through this framework.

6. CONCLUSION

In Barth's third section of providence on the divine ruling, he has taken up the issue of who God is and the results of that for the lives of human beings. God is not an idea or a philosophical concept. God is the King of Israel, the "I am", we know of through scripture. This is the "control" which must be the consistent beginning and reference point for who God is, for from this comes the answers to the rest of the questions, questions concerning the issues and characteristics of divine rule. These answers can only be seen through scripture.

God alone rules because God alone is faithful and free in God's grace. God is the goal because God is love. God is transcendent because God is Lord of both necessity and freedom. These answers can only be seen through scripture.

Because God loves the creature God orders creaturely events. Because God offers a relationship to God's creatures God rules over creatures and ensures their freedom. Because the community and the

individual co-exist God will not allow one to rule at the expense of the other. Because the concrete and revealed God has a revealed purpose that gives form and unity to all events, God is no formless, faceless monad. These answers can only be seen through scripture.

The basic claim in this chapter is that it is God in Jesus Christ who is the subject of world governance. It is not an abstract, hypothetical God but the Lord and Father of Jesus Christ. Christ defines for us who the Father is and defines for us what government is. If God in Jesus Christ is the subject of world governance, then we must again look to Christ to see how it is done. How does Jesus govern?

First and foremost, Jesus governs by dying for us. He governs by offering a relationship with us. God does not govern the world with a clenched fist. God does hold the world in the palm of God's hand, the palm of the crucified one. Just as in the *concursum* God does not rescue us but walks with us, so in the *gubernatio* God does not answer us but is in relationship with us. Again, as in all the questions of providence, God does not answer the question, Why?. God offers God's self in relationship to us, and this we can see clearly in the cross and resurrection -- God offering God's self in the supreme act of relationship -- one who lays down one's life for one's friends (John 15:13).

Because God elected humanity in God's son, because the King of Israel lived, died and rose on our behalf, God rules, is the goal and is transcendent. Because God loves the creature, offers a relationship with creatures, establishes both the individual and the community, gives form and unity to all events, God orders creaturely

events, rules over them and ensures their freedom and will not allow individual or community to rule at the expense of the other. Because God in Jesus Christ elects humanity, loves the creature and offers a relationship with it, God governs. It is all on our behalf. God is not a tyrant who is seeking the destruction of his people, but the one who elects, loves and lives in relationship with the creature. The relationship is primary. The relationship establishes the reason for the governing. It is not that God governs and then decides to elect us. God elects us, lives in relationship with us, and on that basis governs us.

Through Jesus Christ, we see that God does not degrade us by rescuing us or by taking us away from being human beings. Instead, through Jesus Christ, we see that God preserves, accompanies and governs in God's Lordship, which grounds our being, freedom and autonomy. Through Jesus Christ, Barth sees that we need not fear a tyrant neither for our freedom nor for our preservation. Through Christ, God's providence takes away our fear and in its place gives us solidity and confidence. We may walk with God, knowing that though life and its consequences are a mystery to us, God walks with us, preserving us, accompanying us and governing us in Jesus Christ.

As we have talked about *concursus*, we have talked about lordship and autonomy, or the relationship between the freedom/autonomy of the creature and the Lordship/Fatherhood of God. On *gubernatio*, we have taken up the same questions and talked about the governing of God -- the governing characterized by Jesus Christ -- dieing for us and being in relationship with us. They have significantly altered our understanding of providence as Calvin presented it. It is now

important to compare and contrast them both, to see just where and in what ways Barth has reformed Calvin, and what significance this has for us today.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER 6

¹III/3/5. In his book, *Vorsehung und Verheissung Gottes*, (Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1980), Ernst Saxer explains: "If one uses the rule for Calvin, that he fills philosophical ideas with biblical meaning, then one can also use the rule for Barth that he fills dogmatic ideas with biblical meaning. That shows a...basis for the distortion of the materially false orthodox doctrine of providence. It supplies Barth, so to speak, with the necessary 'Gegen-Text', the hostile neighbour on the same floor with whom he can have it out with and get together." (p. 113, my translation) While the point here is not to discuss Barth's various conversation partners, it is important to note that Barth argued with many different aspects of thought while maintaining the Bible as his primary text.

²Our attention in this chapter will be solely on the three elements of providence: preservation, accompaniment and government. While Barth writes about the christian under God's lordship, angels and the problem of evil, they are not the specific theme of this dissertation.

³III/3/6.

⁴*Ibid.* This is also a statement against any idea of continual creation, and would probably be one of Barth's arguments against the modern theory of process theology. God cannot become a pantheistic principle in which the world lives, but must be separate from the world. It also goes against H.R. Mackintosh's view (*Types of Modern Theology*, Nisbet, London, p. 314) that Barth agreed with the idea of continual creation, and thus could be viewed as another aspect of Barth's actualism, that God is not a static being but in act. While Mackintosh is correct in regards to Barth's actualism, as we have seen in previous chapters, Barth expressly denied any *creatio continua*.

⁵This, of course, would allow him to place providence within the doctrine of creation rather than within the doctrine of the being of God as I stated earlier.

⁶III/3/34-5.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁸"The basic contention [of election] is that God has expressed himself fully and frankly in Jesus Christ. This means that there is no fear of God having any side to his nature which conflicts with what can be seen in Jesus Christ, nor is there a need to search anywhere else for a key to the character of God and of history: what God has actually decided is absolute, and is 'the principle and essence of all happening everywhere...a work which still takes place in all its fullness today'. (II/2/183) Hence Barth's insistence that a general idea of providence or world order be subordinated to that of this particular election, for God orders all things with this in mind."

(D.F. Ford, "Barth's Interpretation of the Bible", *Karl Barth -- Studies of his Theological Methods*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1979, pp. 63-4.)

⁹III/3/15.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁷G.W. Bromiley, *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth*, T. & T. Clark Ltd., Edinburgh, 1979, p. 142.

¹⁸III/3/19.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 20.

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 22.

²²*Ibid.*, pp. 22-3. We will see how Barth responds to Gilkey in Chapter 7.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 24.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 33.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 36.

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹Barth makes a passing reference to world and covenant histories coinciding in the eschaton on p. 20, and also stresses the fact that world history serves covenant history. He says that this can be seen in Christ, but will only be apparent in the eschaton.

³²III/3/36.

³³*Ibid.*, p. 37.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 47.

³⁵While it is true that the term "Father" can be a barrier to those who have no conception of fatherly care, I feel that the term must be used here to stress the intimate nature of the relationship God offers us. We must allow God to define "fatherhood" rather than our human, fallible fathers.

³⁶III/3/58.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 58.

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹It has been noted that "one may not care to subsume, as completely as Barth does, the preservation of human life under the rubric of salvation or election. Nevertheless, the Scriptures clearly teach that it is *God* who keeps and guards mankind, who preserves human life and its possibilities." (B.W. Farley, *The Providence of God*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1988) This points out one distinction between Barth's understanding and a more popular view of providence. Without undergirding providence in election and salvation, providence becomes the notion that successes in life point directly to God's will. In other words, if one succeeds or accomplishes something in life, be it anything from winning a football match to securing a job, then surely it must be divine providence which has stamped God's seal of approval on that particular endeavour. When we get something, God wills it and it is thus called providential.

To make divine providence nothing more than the "confirmer" of our wishes is nothing less than idolatry -- idolatry of ourselves. To make God into an eternal, cosmic parent who confirms or denies our human choices is to render God finite and mortal. One of the most important aspects of Barth's reform of Calvin's understanding and indeed the more popular one is to return providence to the divine, to reiterate the fact that providence is not our successes confirmed by God's seal of approval but God preserving humankind deeply and fully, which makes no mention whatsoever of our mortal successes or failures. Indeed, the consistent use of success in human life to confirm or deny God's providence is our sinful attempt to live by sight and not by faith. Providence, backed by election and salvation, tells us about God and only secondarily about humankind. Providence, backed by election, tells us about God's providential caring and preserving of God's own creation and thus about our worth as creatures created by God. It says nothing about the successes or failures of human actions. It says everything about God's love, care and concern for human beings.

⁴⁰III/3/68.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 77-8.

⁵²G.C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, The Paternoster Press, London, 1956, p. 247.

⁵³*Ibid.* Thus, the doctrine of *servatio*. "Therefore the doctrine concerning divine preservation does not teach a metaphysical, neutral 'conservatio' or 'sustentatio,' but a *servatio*, a *rescue from and out of* the danger by which the creature would be overwhelmed and turned into a chaos-element if only its *own* power existed to protect it. Preservation as *salvation* -- that is the theme around which Barth's doctrine is concentrated. The function of the (impossible) chaos becomes evident in the light of the divine *servatio*. The *servatio* is directed against the overwhelming power of the threatening chaos." (Berkouwer, pp. 70-1) Election, salvation, preservation. The three must be viewed together. Preservation must be grounded in election and salvation, for thus the creature is preserved against non-existence. Election grounds providence.

⁵⁴C. Duthie, in his article "Providence in the Theology of Karl Barth" (*Providence*, SPCK Theological Collections, 12, M. Wiles, ed., SPCK, London, 1969), points out many of the problems of Barth's doctrine of Nothingness. Is this idea one found in scripture? Is it instead a philosophical idea? And even more, although Barth maintains that God does not cause evil, he "comes very near to saying...that the creation of the world carries with it the possibility, which in due course becomes the actuality, of evil." (65-66)

The fact that evil is something God did not create but passed over does set up the question of the origin of evil. If God says No to it, where did it come from? And if, when God says Yes to something, there must be a No, is not this setting up a dualistic structure? This is perhaps a weakness of Barth's, that although he would never call it dualistic, nevertheless, in his structuring of the problem of evil, he has allowed it to be so. In this dissertation,

however, I am only showing Barth's reform of Calvin with regard to method and how that changes one's doctrine of providence. In a previous draft das Nichtige was considered but it was felt to be too long for this discussion.

⁵⁵Ibid./3/78.

⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 78-9.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 79.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 80.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid., pp. 81-2.

⁶³Ibid., p. 82.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 86.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 88.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 89.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 90.

⁶⁹Emil Brunner, among others, refused to acknowledge the *concursum divinum* as a legitimate concept within providence. He said it is "valueless and extremely doubtful." (*The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption: Dogmatics Vol. II*, Lutterworth Press, London, 1952, p. 153.) "We human beings cannot even understand -- with our minds -- how the human spirit and brain can exist in and alongside of one another; if this is impossible, still more must we renounce all attempts to understand *how* the independence granted to us as created beings and God's preserving activity can be interwoven. Here we come to a full stop. We are not meant to probe any further." (p. 154) While Brunner was correct in refusing to see the divine-human encounter as a causal relationship, realising its relational character, to dismiss the question of human freedom and divine omnipotence simply because we cannot understand it perfectly is rather blind. Brunner claims that the *concursum divinum* separates what it should not, "the independence of the Creation and the Divine work of Preservation." (154) The point of Barth's doctrine of *concursum*, however, is not to divide them but to acknowledge their relational character and the fact that God in Jesus Christ is their ground and basis.

Berkouwer, too, questions whether the *concursum divinum* is a

legitimate aspect of providence. He entitles his chapter, "A Third Aspect?" In it he goes to great lengths to discuss causes, permission and whether God is the author of sin. The question remains, however, as to the relationship between divine omnipotence and human freedom. *Concursus* is important because it is "an attempt to do justice to the problem of a co-existence and antithesis of the divine and creaturely action which should correspond with the testimony of Scripture...." (III/3/96.)

⁷⁰III/3/92.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁷²*Ibid.*

⁷³*Ibid.*

⁷⁴*Ibid.*

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 93-4.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*

⁷⁸*Ibid.* While any attempt to deal with the question of evil is going to be problematic, it can hardly be said with Duthie that, "It is hardly satisfactory to speak of the world as God's good creation, on the one hand, and then, on the other, as a world affected by the Nihil. It would surely be better, with de Chardin and other modern writers, to accept the universe as a universe in which evil arises through the processes of disorder and failure, of decay, of solitude and anxiety, and of growth itself. Evil comes to be precisely because our world is a world built for the development of freedom, the growth in wisdom and love of personal spirits." (*Op. cit.*, pp. 74-5.) Surely Christians can, and have, affirmed that the world is good because God created it and that there is evil in the world, however we choose to define it. To say that "evil arises through the processes of disorder and failure" says no less about the goodness of creation and the presence of evil. Perhaps, as Duthie argues, the question lies more with the fact that Barth refuses to allow God to be the author of evil, yet maintains God's deepest involvement with creatures in their situation. That question is one more of how an infinite God can both respect God's creation and rule it, and less the question of what evil is called and where it comes from.

⁷⁹III/3/94.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*

⁸¹Arguably one of the best explanations of why Barth does not go into lengthy discussions about the historical accuracy of scripture, other than his typological exegesis, is from D.F. Ford: "Barth is more concerned with the sort of God portrayed than with the

verifiability of details in the stories." (Ford, *Op. cit.*, p. 70.) This, of course, is not to say that Barth considered the historical accuracy irrelevant. It is to say that scripture is concerned about God and showing God to humanity, rather than citing date and time in the minutest detail for every event. It also helps explain why Barth does not use historical criticism on a habitual basis.

⁸²John Skinner, *Genesis, The International Critical Commentary*, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1910, p. 487.

⁸³G. von Rad, *Genesis*, SCM Press, London, 1961, p. 393.

⁸⁴III/3/95.

⁸⁵IV/3/687.

⁸⁶III/3/95-6.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*

⁹¹*Ibid.*

⁹²"It is his sense of the absolute lordship of God that makes him reluctant to employ the concept of 'cause' when dealing with God's activity and his relation to natural or creaturely happenings lest God and his freedom be made subordinate and subservient to 'causality'. This lordship is universal." (Duthie, *Op. cit.* p. 72.)

⁹³III/3/100.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*

⁹⁵*Ibid.*

⁹⁶Here Barth is referring to the first two articles of the Apostles' Creed, God as Father and Son. He elaborates this further in his book, *Dogmatics in Outline*, (SCM Press, London, 1949).

⁹⁷III/3/113-5.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 115-7.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 117.

¹⁰⁰"K. Barth consciously falls back on *Tradition*, he consciously wants to see himself in a line with reformed Orthodoxy: thus, too, his historically correct demythologising of the 'theological legend' of A. Schweizer, which says that the reformed tradition knows no doctrine of

concurus or the *concurus divinus* as the centre part of the doctrine of the doctrine of providence. Thus Barth takes over the division into three parts of the doctrine of *concurus*...and he accepts, with the utmost emphasis, the *praecursus* in the reformed tradition. Thus he goes back...again and again to representatives of the old protestant and especially the reformed orthodoxy..." Michael Plathow, *Das Problem des concursus divinus*, Vandenhoech & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1976, pp. 133-4, my translation.

¹⁰¹III/3/119.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*

¹⁰³Duthie says that for Barth, "The precedence is interpreted in terms of foreordination. Calvin was not wrong in taking the idea of predestination seriously; he was wrong in failing to connect it with Christ." (Duthie, *Op. cit.*, p. 67)

¹⁰⁴III/3/130.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, p. 132. "According to his innertrinitarian partnership in his merciful love and free election, the triune God has determined the partnership with humanity in Jesus Christ, his son; in the history of the covenant, which the event of providence and *concurus* is associated with, he fulfils this partnershiplike relationship. And so it is the triune God who revealed himself to Abraham and Moses, who spoke to and through the prophets, who made himself the God of Israel and the Lord of its history, who in Jesus Christ became a human being and the leader of the community of people, who let the creature be object but also means, instrument and organ of his work in the event of the covenant and who accompanies the creature at the same time in its relative independence in the event of providence." Plathow, *Op. cit.*, p. 118, my translation.

¹⁰⁷III/3/132.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, p. 41. "As Jesus Christ is the real basis for knowledge of creation and providence so is he the basis of the divine accompanying.

In Jesus Christ's humiliation and exaltation lies the ontic basis of the *concurus divinus*, the working together of creation and created corresponds to the imitation of believers based on participation in the 'exalted' man Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ, very God and very man, is both the basis of knowledge of the *concurus divinus* and the archetype of the coexistence and working together of God and man, in him is revealed the secret of the unity of God and man not as a paradox but as the surmounting of the contradiction of the *Doxa* of God, not as a riddle but a solved riddle. The doctrine of *Anhypostasia* sees the unity as the taking on of human being into God's being as *Enhypostasia*, without thinking of any real independent existence. That is the archetype of the ontological structure of K. Barth's understanding of *concurus*.

In Jesus Christ is not only the basis but rather also the goal of the being and working together of creator and created: to him, to his glory is everything ordered.

Through this *christocentric* structure the accompanying experiences, as regards content, an unambiguous direction. God, the one who accompanies has revealed himself in Jesus Christ." (Plathow, *Op. cit.*, p. 128, my translation.)

¹⁰⁹III/3/141-2.

¹¹⁰*The Epistle to the Romans*, Oxford Univ. Press, London, 1933, p. 422.

¹¹¹III/3/144.

¹¹²Duthie, *Op. cit.*, tells us that one of Barth's central problems concerns the way he understand divine and human action. Duthie maintains that in his insistence on the lordship of God, Barth does less than justice to human freedom and activity. "Granted that there is a danger of falling into synergism, of thinking that man is the co-saviour of himself along with God, must we not take full measure of the fact that, although man is not the author of his own salvation, he is involved as a person in that salvation, responding as well as receiving, indeed responding in so far as he does receive?" (73) "Barth does not take proper account of what may be called the tensional because truly personal relationship between God and man. It is a relationship which by its very nature gives to man the opportunity either to co-operate or to resist. He can say yes or he can say no to God." (74)

Barth's section 4 on the Christian under God's lordship makes it difficult to agree with Duthie, simply because of Barth's insistence that it is the Christian under God's lordship. While, indeed, the Christian knows that he or she may make no claim to distinction, the very fact that Barth's section is on the Christian specifically points to a reality for the Christian which the non-Christian does not know. It is the Christian who has "been affected and laid hold of by the object of the doctrine itself." (III/3/244.) One would be hard pressed to say that for Barth, human beings cannot say No to God.

What Duthie's argument does point to, however, is Barth's different understanding of freedom. While Barth allows for the fact that human beings can say No to God, he would hardly call that freedom. Saying No to God is bondage. True freedom is saying Yes to God. It is responding as a finite creature to the infinite God. We will look closer at this in the next section.

¹¹³III/3/146.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 149.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 150.

¹¹⁶Colin Gunton, "The Triune God and the Freedom of the Creature", in *Karl Barth: Centenary Essays*, ed. S.W. Sykes, Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge, 1989, p. 54.

¹¹⁷III/3/157.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 160.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*

¹²¹*Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹²²*Ibid.*

¹²³*Ibid.*, p. 167.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 165.

¹²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 166.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*

¹²⁷Karl Barth, "The Gift of Freedom: Foundation of Evangelical Ethics", *The Humanity of God*, John Knox Press, Richmond, VA, 1960, 76-7.

¹²⁸III/3/168.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 168-9.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹³¹*Ibid.*

¹³²*Ibid.*

¹³³*Ibid.*, p. 170.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 176.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*

¹³⁶*Ibid.*

¹³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 177.

¹³⁸*Ibid.*

¹³⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 180.

¹⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 186.

¹⁴²*Ibid.*

- ¹⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 187.
- ¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*
- ¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 188.
- ¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 189.
- ¹⁴⁷*Ibid.*
- ¹⁴⁸*Ibid.*
- ¹⁴⁹IV/1/100-1.
- ¹⁵⁰III/3/190.
- ¹⁵¹*Ibid.*, pp. 190-1.
- ¹⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 191.
- ¹⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 192.
- ¹⁵⁴*Ibid.*, p. 197.
- ¹⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 198.
- ¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*
- ¹⁵⁷*Ibid.*
- ¹⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 199.
- ¹⁵⁹*Ibid.*
- ¹⁶⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 199-200.
- ¹⁶¹*Ibid.*, pp. 218-19.
- ¹⁶²*Ibid.*, p. 230.
- ¹⁶³*Ibid.*
- ¹⁶⁴Colin Gunton, Sykes, p. 54.
- ¹⁶⁵III/3/233.
- ¹⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 235.

REFORMED AND ALWAYS REFORMING

A. Revelation and Relationship

In Chapter 1 we saw that Calvin maintained two sources for the knowledge of God the Creator: general and special revelation. We saw two aspects of general revelation in the *sensus divinitatis* and the natural world. Knowledge of God the Creator was "innate" in the creature and seen in God's works in the natural world. Despite the Fall and the corruption of human knowledge of God, the possibility of even an unclear knowledge of God through these avenues is nonetheless evident. Corrupt though we may be, it is still conceivable that we have a kind of knowledge of God, however imperfect.

Knowledge of God the Creator found in scripture is correlated to what was already seen in general revelation. Reference to the Old Testament points out this correlation and thus it is the same God whom we know both in scripture and in general revelation.¹ Knowledge of God the Creator found in scripture points to the Trinity -- and to the fact that the Trinity is revealed and is not an invention of humankind. Calvin stresses that within the doctrine of the Trinity, the knowledge of God is a discussion of the second person of the Trinity and not christology.

Special revelation also points us to knowledge of God the Creator in creation and providence. Scripture gives evidence for the knowledge of God the Creator in both of these.

Revelation, for Calvin, is divided into two areas of knowledge.

One is knowledge of God the Creator and the other is knowledge of God the Redeemer. Revelation is how God reveals God's self in human beings, in the natural world, in scripture and later, in Christ.² Each is distinct and important.

In clear contrast to this structure, Barth refuses to begin his understanding of revelation with human beings, the natural world or scripture. He begins only with Jesus Christ. This delineates him in two ways: from Calvin and from post-Enlightenment anthropologically oriented theology of which Langdon Gilkey is a spokesperson. While Calvin is the father of Reformed theology and Gilkey is one attempt at revising him, we see that Barth is always attempting to bring theology back to its starting point, Jesus Christ. Barth's "always reforming" is a reform of both Calvin and Gilkey.

One of the most influential aspects of what Barth did in theology was to disengage the theological endeavour from any and all proofs of God's existence. He realized that the liberalism of the 19th century was little more than anthropology raised to divine levels, thus rendering their theology superfluous.³ In this way Barth also counters Gilkey's anthropological theology. Yet he did not return to the scholastic questions concerning the proofs of God's existence. For Barth those kinds of questions were non-questions. Reformed Christian theology had to begin first with revelation, and in particular with Jesus Christ. Thus he counters both Gilkey and Calvin. This decision at once sets out a different theological agenda.

In beginning with Jesus Christ, Barth comes to grips with God revealing God's self in Jesus Christ, and thus it becomes the core of

his theology. "God reveals Himself. He reveals Himself *through Himself*. He reveals *Himself*."⁴ God revealing God's self means that it is truly God revealing God's self, that our God is a God who reveals God's self rather than a God who stays hidden and is prone to caprice and that God reveals God's self, not simply one aspect or part of God. This God known in scripture and in particular Jesus Christ is the God who reveals who he is essentially. Who God is eternally is no different than who God is in history.

If 'God for man' is the eternal covenant revealed and effective in time in the humanity of Jesus, in this decision of the Creator for the creature there arises a relationship which is not alien to the Creator, to God as God, but we might almost say appropriate and natural to Him. God repeats in this relationship *ad extra* a relationship proper to Himself in His inner divine essence. Entering into this relationship, He makes a copy of Himself. Even in His inner divine being there is relationship. To be sure, God is One in Himself. But He is not alone. There is in Him a co-existence, co-inherence and reciprocity. God in Himself is not just simple, but in the simplicity of His essence He is threefold -- the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.⁵

To the unity of Father, Son and Spirit among themselves corresponds their unity *ad extra*. God's essence and work are not twofold but one. God's work is His essence in its relation to the reality which is distinct from Him and which is to be created or is created by Him. The work of God is the essence of God as the essence of Him who...is revealer, revelation and being revealed, or Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer.⁶

We cannot begin anywhere else in our theological task. Thus God reveals God's self in God's triune form -- the Son, the Father of the Son and their unity of love which is the Holy Spirit.

But the heart of it all is that it is He Himself, the one, supreme and true Lord, who thus unveils Himself to us; that in revelation we have to do with His action as the triune God, and therefore with Himself in every creaturely work and sign that He uses. On this basis and only on this basis can there be real knowledge of God.⁷

How we understand revelation determines whether we believe we

truly know God or know only a part or aspect of God. If God truly reveals God's self in Jesus Christ, then we need not look for a hidden God or a hidden will which lies behind the God we perhaps see in the natural world or in ourselves. If revelation is God incarnate in the world then we can be certain that this is the true God and there is no hidden will lying behind the will of God incarnate. Because of the nature of this revelation, because God reveals God's self and not anyone or anything else, because who God is in history is who God is eternally, we can be certain that when we see Jesus we see God. Jesus Christ is no phantom nor a half-hearted effort at who God is. Jesus is who God always was. Jesus Christ is God incarnate in human flesh. Thus to see Jesus is to see God.

But if it is He Himself who unveils Himself to us, the revelation is characterised as revelation of the truth beside which there is no other and above which there is none higher. Therefore the idea of impartation must not be taken to mean that in His revelation God gives Himself to be known by us only in part, so that we still have to await the revelation of another God in another and higher order, or the revelation of the same God in a different form. The fact that we receive only a share in the truth of His knowledge of Himself does not mean that we have to do only with a limited quantity of His being and not, or not yet, with some other quantity. God is who He is, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer, supreme, the one true Lord; and He is known in this entirety or He is not known at all. There is no existence of God behind or beyond this entirety of His being. Whatever we can know and say about the being of God can be only a continual explanation of this entirety.²⁴

Barth's understanding of revelation strikes down all notions of a hidden will of God which is somehow more real than the will of God which is revealed. Because God is a revealing God, we can be certain that who God reveals God's self to be is who God is.

The revelation of God in Jesus Christ is the determining factor

of Barth's theology. Jesus Christ shows us God and humanity and thus determines theology. One could say that Barth's theology is thoroughly determined by Jesus Christ. Once a person has understood revelation and who Jesus Christ is in that revelation, then every doctrine flows from this. Predestination and providence are two examples of the one revelation in Jesus Christ.

This brings up the crucial question of relationship. How can we fail to notice that Father, Son and Holy Spirit live in relationship? How can we so unify them that we refuse to see their distinctiveness and thus their relatedness? For if they live in relationship, we also know there is an interpenetration of them with one another -- how else could they be One?⁹ That means they have power and authority and energy because they possess their own power. They possess their power as individuals, and in the perichoresis they interpenetrate one another in such a way that they are One. If they did not, if we understood the perichoresis as three individuals who were solitary individuals, then we can see that their autonomy means separation and standing alone. If they stand alone, however, how can they be in relation to one another? If they separate themselves from relationship, how can they really know the other? How can the Father know the Son and Holy Spirit, and how can the Son know the Father and Holy Spirit? How can the Father feel the death of his own son, to know what it is like to lose a child, to watch as the life is drained from his own son's face?¹⁰ How can the Son know the utter anguish of abandonment if he has never had the relationship with the Father and Holy Spirit? How could the Son say, "My God, why have you abandoned

me?" if he has never known the relationship which takes away the fear of abandonment?

In the words 'My God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Jesus is putting at stake not only his personal existence, but his theological existence, his whole proclamation of God....In the theological context of his life and preaching, the issue in his death...[was] that of the deity of his God and his Father. The rejection expressed in his dying cry...must therefore be understood strictly as something which took place between Jesus and his Father, and in the other direction between his Father and Jesus, the Son -- that is, as something which took place between God and God. The abandonment on the cross which separates the Son from the Father is something which takes place within God himself; it is *stasis* within God -- 'God against God'....''

Not only does God the Son suffer but God the Father suffers as well. They both suffer but they suffer in different ways. The Father does not suffer death, but suffers the loss of his son. They both suffer, the Son the death on the cross, the Father the death of his son.

The Son suffers dying, the Father suffers the death of the Son. The grief of the Father here is just as important as the death of the Son. The Fatherlessness of the Son is matched by the Sonlessness of the Father, and if God has constituted himself as the Father of Jesus Christ, then he also suffers the death of his Fatherhood in the death of the Son....The Father who abandons him and delivers him up suffers the death of the Son in the infinite grief of love.¹²

On that cross we see the embodiment of relationship, of what it means when true relationship has been there and now is being given up, on behalf of another relationship. We see the real pathos, the real relationship that has been there from the beginning and which is being sacrificed for the sake of a relationship with another, with humankind. On the cross we see the rending of the relationship within the Godhead on behalf of God's relationship with humankind.

Seen from this perspective, Barth critiques both Calvin and Gilkey. Barth says No to Calvin's insistence on such unity within the

Godhead that little relationship exists at all with in it. Barth says No to Gilkey by refusing to begin with our human problems and fashioning a god whom we think we need. Gilkey's god must be remade in the image of every generation. Hardly a god at all.

Barth, however, must be reformed as well. While he brought theology back to its christocentric emphasis and to the understanding that God defines our words (fatherhood, lordship), he did not see that in recognizing the three "persons" of the Trinity, he must therefore look at their relationship. In stressing the three "I's" of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Barth did not see that the way these three relate to each other has enormous implications for the way their creatures relate to themselves.

While standing alongside Barth, I believe that if Father, Son and Holy Spirit relate to each other, if their relationship is primary rather than a subsidiary of unity, then our ideas of autonomy have to change. Autonomy, if defined by God and God's own internal relationship, no longer means separation and standing alone. Autonomy exists in relationship. Note that relationship does not mean suffocation or smothering. In God we see none of that. But autonomy in relationship means the complete honouring of the other, such that the other can and does stand as an individual, but never abandoned or disregarded. While indeed, autonomy does mean "self-governing",¹³ "self-governing", as seen in the Trinity, does not mean three separate gods who stand alone as islands. Autonomy, self-governing, as seen in the Trinity, is a standing-alongside-of, a genuine respect of oneself and the other. It is integrity. The Father respects the Son and Holy Spirit, the Son respects the Father and Holy Spirit, and the Holy

Spirit respects the Father and Son. We see this especially in the Holy Spirit. For on that cross, while the Father was experiencing the death of his son and the Son experiencing death itself, the Holy Spirit knew the pain and anguish of them both and yet honoured their respective decisions. In the interpenetration within the Trinity the Holy Spirit knew the pain of the Father and Son, yet rather than rescue either, chose to stand alongside both. In the relationship of love existing in the Godhead, the Holy Spirit knew the love of Father for Son, Son for Father, and the love of God for humankind such that Father and Son would endure death on behalf of humanity.

Surely Barth's renewing our understanding of the Trinity and basing our theology there brings us part of the way back from a model of God which requires us to have a loving God on the one hand and the real and true God on the other, thus rending God asunder and requiring a secret, hidden God opposite a loving and merciful God. By reminding us that we begin with the Trinity and not ourselves and our pains and woes, we also are turned away from our endless golden calves -- of creating our gods to suit us.

There are implications of this Trinitarian God who exists in relationship, who grounds autonomy in relationship, and who willingly sacrifices God's own internal relationship for the sake of the creatures whom God so lovingly created.¹⁴ Again, standing alongside Barth, I propose that this Trinitarian God requires us to look to God for our understanding of relationship, rather than to our all-too-human and fallible notions of how human beings should live together. If, through the Godhead we see autonomy based on relationship rather than on three separate beings who are islands or on a strict unity out of

fear of relationship, perhaps we are called to attempt to give expression to that genuine understanding of relationship in our own lives. To be sure, we are not called to be God. But our recognition of our humanness and creatureliness should not stop us from attempting to live as God made us. Rather than viewing living as a solitary endeavour, we can see it truly when we see it as an image of relationship, beautifully created creatures whose autonomy is grounded in the relationship of the Trinity and thus the relationships among themselves.

This will have implications for our understanding of ministry and pastoral care, for far from demanding our flock to become autonomous islands, we can encourage them to assert their God-given beauty in the midst of relationships. Far from requiring them to be solitary Christians standing in the midst of heathens, they are autonomous Christians whose autonomy is grounded in the Trinity and thus affirmed as relational beings.

The issue of God's trinitarian being in relationship necessarily leads us into the vexing problem of natural theology for we are again brought to the question of the knowledge of God. The question cannot be answered here, but it is important to address it.

When Zophar the Naamathite asked Job, "Canst thou by searching find out God?", he proposed one of the most vexing mysteries of being human. Where does humanity stand with regard to the knowledge of God? Can humanity learn of God? In what way? How do we know God?¹⁵

It is evident that Calvin was vitally aware of the knowledge of God which came from human reason, the human body and indeed the whole of nature. Calvin took seriously the knowledge of God the Creator in

Book I of the *Institutes*, and was highly and sensitively aware of its impact. He took seriously God's revelation in both creation and in the creature itself, as well as the revelation which comes through scripture. To negate this would be to negate Calvin's entire first book.

Not only this, but Calvin's use of philosophical concepts and philosophers must also be taken into account. However he may have deprecated philosophers and their concepts, it is evident that his earlier education was not wasted. He made use of what he could for his understanding of Christianity. He was not above using Cicero, Stoicism or humanism for his own purposes, however much he disagreed with their philosophy.¹⁶ As one commentator expresses it:

It appears to me that...it may be possible to regard the first five chapters of Book I not as a series of arguments, but instead as examples of intellectual and theological autobiography, recorded for both apologetic and methodological purposes. In other words, the kind of theologizing that Calvin was doing and to which he invited following was not to be undertaken in a cultural vacuum, but presupposed a thorough acquaintance with the classical Greek and Roman literature. ... If this is so, then the Ciceronian interpretation of the natural knowledge of God evaluated negatively nevertheless does serve a highly useful purpose. It is an introduction, the first step toward the encounter with revelation.¹⁷

One interesting entrée into Calvin's "natural theology" has been to suggest that there is a three-fold use of the natural knowledge of God just as Calvin spoke of a three-fold use of the law,¹⁸ and it is indeed useful for examining Calvin's natural theology. Clearly Calvin's background in humanism and philosophy cannot be discounted. To do so would be to deny Calvin part of his own heritage.¹⁹

To the use of philosophical concepts, Christian tradition, human reason, the human body or nature itself as the focus of God's

revelation, Barth said no. No human endeavour or understanding could ever reveal God to humankind. To do so would have made God and humanity have a point of contact, a common essence (however small), which Barth believed was a disastrous theological concept. There is no bridge from humanity to God. God bridges the way to us.

His complete refusal to use an *analogia entis* is one way of understanding this. There is no correspondence between God and humanity in essence or being. There is no common genus of which God and humanity are species. He discusses this in trying to understand the "image of God."

But for all the disparity...there is a correspondence and similarity between the two relationships. This is not a correspondence and similarity of being, an *analogia entis*. The being of God cannot be compared with that of man. But it is not a question of this twofold being. It is a question of the relationship within the being of God on the one side and between the being of God and that of man on the other. Between these two relationships as such -- and it is in this sense that the second is the image of the first -- there is correspondence and similarity. There is an *analogia relationis*.²⁰

Thus:

The one and only Son of the one and only God, the very incarnate Word of God to which Moses and the prophets had borne witness, could be and inevitably was rejected by Israel, and its whole history could be and was inevitably proved to be the history of human disobedience to the one and only God in a manner both awesome and final. Could there be any better proof that God's uniqueness is really His, God's uniqueness, not a matter of a human idea of God, but of His revelation, of His speaking and acting, of His inmost being, inseparable from His grace and holiness? Could there be any better proof that it is as little the discovery of a human mind as His grace and holiness and all His other perfections, and that as a divine reality it is diametrically opposed to creaturely reality, including even the highest human faculty of construction and foresight, and can become an object of human knowledge only in the way in which God in any of His perfections can become such an object? In face of the cross of Christ it is monstrous to describe the uniqueness of God as an object of "natural" knowledge. In face of the cross of Christ we are bound to

say that knowledge of the one and only God is gained only by the begetting of men anew by the Holy Spirit, an act which is always unmerited and incomprehensible, and consists in man's no longer living unto himself, but in the Word of God and in the knowledge of God which comes by faith in that Word.²¹

To do this would also split God up into a being and actions, and Barth believes God to be a being in act. We cannot separate God from God's act in Jesus Christ. "Revelation remains revelation and does not become a revealed state. Revelation remains identical with Christ and Christ remains the object of Christian faith, even though He lives in Christians and they in Him."²² "Revelation in the Christian sense takes place and God in the Christian sense is, in accordance with the news of Jesus Christ, His words and deeds, His death and resurrection."²³

Revelation in the Christian sense is the revelation of God. For the Christian there is no need of a special enquiry and a special proof to know and to declare who and what God is. For the Christian the revelation is itself the proof, the proof furnished by God Himself. The Christian answer to the question as to who and what God is, is a simple one: He is the subject who acts in His revelation. This act of revelation is a token of His Being and the expression of His nature.²⁴

Barth also bases his antithesis to natural theology on his understanding of the reconciliation in Jesus Christ. It is pure grace, and only when we want to deny that reconciliation will we seek our own knowledge of God.

If the atonement is an act of divine sovereignty, we are forbidden to try to deduce it from anything else or to deduce anything else from it. But, above all, we are commanded to accept and acknowledge it in all its inconceivability as something that has happened, taking it strictly as it is without thinking round it or over it. This is the place and the only place from which as Christians we can think forwards and backwards, from which a Christian knowledge of both God and man is possible....It is here that all natural theology perishes even before it has

drawn its first breath.²⁵

Yet in Barth's denial of natural theology, he did notice the *analogia relationis*. "It is a question of the relationship within the being of God on the one side and between the being of God and that of man on the other."²⁶ He knew that here was no *analogia entis* but an *analogia relationis*. It is this which is important for our study. It is the inner-trinitarian relationship which gives us the basis from which to have a relationship with God and with our fellow creatures. It is not, then, to say that God the Father asked his Son to die. It is to see that the Father asked himself to give up his only Son, to watch his only Son die on a cross. It is to see that the Son asked of himself to give up himself for the people (John 12:50). It is to see that the Holy Spirit asked himself to allow the perichoretic unity to dissolve, to die, to permit the perichoretic unity to take into itself a breach, a break. If the Holy Spirit is the bond of love, or better, the maintainer of the circle of love in the perichoretic unity and thus a truly third "person", then the Holy Spirit, too, had to watch as this circle of love and relationship was broken when the Son died. He allowed this circle of love and relationship to die that we might live. He generously gave up the circle of love and relationship of the Godhead for humankind. This relationship, and its aspects of alonsidedness, autonomy and power, must be seen closer up. It is to this that we now turn.

B. Alonsidedness and Autonomy

According to Calvin, humanity does not understand God's ways and actions, especially the biblical remarks that God repents, etc. He

did not like the fact that God would be doing rather human, sinful actions. Therefore, when the Bible says that God repents, some allowance for human understanding must be happening so that God is not really repenting. God cannot repent. God is omnipotent and omniscient and therefore has no need for repentance. What is really going on is that human beings do not understand what God is doing so scripture uses the word "repent" of God to accommodate to humanity, not because God actually repents.

Or, because human events appear fortuitous then we must shore up any vacillation on the part of the Almighty and say that that is the way they appear to us but that is not really the way they are. From God's point of view the events of history happen just as God has ordained them.

All this brings to mind several questions. If God is accommodating God's self to us, are we really encountering God? If we are only seeing the part of God that God wants us to see, then how can we trust God? What if God is only like that part of the time? And, when it comes to the incarnation in Jesus Christ, are we really seeing God or just a part of God? Is Jesus Christ "God with us" or a part of God with us that God wants us to see?

A corollary question asks, If God accommodates God's self to human understanding such that we cannot be certain that in Jesus Christ we see God himself, who is the God who remains hidden? Can we trust God and Jesus Christ if there is something behind him? What does this God have to do with us?

These questions are found in both providence and predestination for, as we have seen, Calvin speaks of God's hidden will in both

contexts. This is the important related question to the ones just posed, for if there is a crucial hidden will which humanity must succumb to but never know, then we must argue with Calvin about his insistence that he maintains only one will of God. If there is one will revealed in Jesus Christ and another hidden in God, there is more than one will of God.

We are referred back to our discussion of who Jesus Christ is for Calvin, and the question to him is imperative: If there is only one will of God, as you say, then why have you maintained both a will of God in Jesus Christ and a hidden will of God which humanity can never know? Who is this hidden God? This is one of the fundamental disagreements between Calvin and Barth. They do not agree on who Christ is for us.

According to Barth, Christ is where all things must begin in order to be seen truthfully. Christ is not simply one cause among several for God's eternal decrees which lie behind him. Christ is that decree. Christ is not simply a comfort to us when we cannot understand why some believe and others do not. Christ is our belief. Christ is not simply a means to an end but is the means and the end.

Calvin and Barth interpret Christ differently. For Calvin, Christ is the comfort that humanity is drawn to when faced with decrees hidden in God. For Barth, Christ is God's eternal decree. There is nothing behind God or Christ that we do not know about or have to fear. In Christ we see who God is and what God is up to.

The problem inherent in accommodation is whether or not God reveals God's self as God or as something different, something accommodated to humanity. If God reveals God's self, then is that

revelation truly and really God or is it some part or aspect of God yet not really all of God? Are we dealing with a part of God or God's own self?

Barth deals with this especially in relationship to what or on whom we base election. If we use human conception of what God should be or philosophical concepts of the divine, then surely we arrive at one, or perhaps several, understandings of God and God's election, while if we base our understanding of God on God incarnate, then we have another understanding. If we base election on our human concepts or beliefs in omnipotence, omniscience and various other important beliefs, then they will determine how we believe and understand God. Those concepts and beliefs will be the foundation for understanding God. They become the genus of the species "God". If, however, we look and listen to God incarnate, our human beliefs in omnipotence, etc., must undergo profound changes. If God reveals God's self to humankind really, truly and completely, then God is the genus and thus defines every species, concept or belief that we have about God. God defines God's self.

Thus, if we look and listen to God incarnate, we must review and change our visions of power, glory, omnipotence, omniscience, providence and predestination. We must take seriously the "Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles". (1Cor. 1:23) Omnipotence and power are defined by hanging on a cross and omniscience by "My God, my God, why have you forgotten me!" Providence is less God determining us to fall among thieves and be killed or to be bypassed by those same thieves, as it is God walking with us through every step of our lives, not as an autocratic ruler in

the human sense but as a fellow traveller who takes our lives seriously and deeply grounds our autonomy. In this walking with us the incarnate God walks into all the blind alleys, the tragedies of life and the joys of being that we do, without taking autocratic control but being the foundation of our autonomy and selfhood that God created. God respects all those whom God created.

This is seen quite clearly in the problem of *concursum*. The doctrine of *concursum* has to do with the relationship between the sovereign Lord and the finite creature. It is concerned about whether the creature has any freedom or autonomy at all in the face of a God who is Lord, albeit a fatherly Lord, and if so, what that freedom means. As a result, Barth defines what he means by "Lord", encompassing both sovereignty and fatherhood. This he does by pointing to Jesus Christ, the one who shows us who God is. Through Jesus Christ we know that sovereignty, fatherhood, and Lord have to do with a prior decision on God's part to love, save, and glorify the creature, and this God does in God's own freedom. Instead of God being "free" to be against the creature, Jesus Christ shows us that God's freedom means to be for the creature, working on our behalf. It is as if Barth wants to stress "if God is for us, who is against us?" (Rom. 8:31) God's freedom is not the freedom of a tyrant who seeks to do evil to those he rules. According to Barth that is unfreedom, bondage. True freedom is that of the God who is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, who rules in fatherly Lordship. We must seek to understand Lordship, fatherhood, and freedom in those terms, even if it means we must return to scripture to redefine the words.

In response to Calvin, Barth will not capitulate to divine

sovereignty at the expense of human freedom. In response to Gilkey, Barth will not capitulate to human freedom at the expense of divine sovereignty. To capitulate in either direction is to refuse to live within the tension of being a human being created by God, the tension of living in autonomous relationship. To capitulate to divine sovereignty at the expense of human freedom renders human beings puppets and makes a mockery of their God-given autonomy, their self-government in the midst of relationship. To capitulate to human freedom at the expense of divine sovereignty is to render God superfluous, to knit God in an image to suit ourselves. Again, it is to refuse to live within the tension.²⁸

A new explanation of who God is by beginning with the Son is called for, or Barth might say, by beginning with the revelation of the Word, rather than with any philosophical or religious conception of who God might be or should be. If we are to learn, understand or grasp just who God is and how God relates to us, it might be to our advantage to begin with the one in whom God reveals God's self most clearly, authoritatively and genuinely, rather than with any notion of goodness, omniscience or omnipotence that we might come up with. It also might be a far truer picture.

Perhaps the point here is to stop and ask ourselves the question, "Just exactly how is Jesus himself free?" We have heard from Barth that God accompanies us in God's freedom and that God grounds our freedom. To truly see, however, how humanity is free, it is important to look directly at Jesus himself. Just exactly how is Jesus free?

Was Jesus free because he obeyed? Yet he did not obey the rules of the religious hierarchy.²⁹ He was not a "good" Jew. He ate and

drank with sinners.³⁰ What was Jesus' freedom like?

Was it freedom to hear what God was saying? Was it perhaps a freedom for God rather than our human idea of the freedom to rebel, i.e., freedom of good or evil? Perhaps it was Jesus' freedom to listen to God or perhaps himself that was freedom, rather than forcing himself to be who the religious people wanted him to be. Perhaps it was Jesus' freedom to listen to himself and to God and to be for himself and for God that was his freedom and self-governing autonomy, rather than the bondage of the beliefs and laws of the religious.

One example is the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53-8:11). The religious people were going to stone her. They knew the law. She, indeed, should be stoned according to the law.

Jesus responds, however, not with a rock to help stone her, nor does he engage her opponents in arguments about Torah and the relative sinfulness of the woman's crime as opposed to other sins. Jesus does not engage the authorities in their own understanding of life. Jesus stands free -- free to see all things differently.

In Jesus' freedom, Jesus answers people rather than questions. There was certainly no question that the woman was caught in adultery and therefore subject to the law and stoning. Jesus never raises the question concerning her guilt or innocence. But Jesus does answer the people -- Jesus confronts them with themselves. Jesus confronts them with who they are and asks them to look at themselves, not to try and condemn others to assuage their own guilt.

We notice, too, that Jesus is both honest and understanding. Jesus never said that the woman was not guilty, nor that the people were also not guilty. He was deadly honest. Everybody standing there

was guilty of sin. But Jesus understood that. He knew it within himself and refused to condemn. He stated things the way they were, not the way people wanted them to be.

Is that freedom? Certainly a different freedom than our human idea that freedom means the ability to do good or evil any time we want to. It is a freedom which comes from within rather than from without. It is an interior freedom to be rather than being manipulated from the outside.³¹

If that is how Jesus was free, that is how God is free, for Jesus shows us God. Jesus is who God always was. It means that God is for God's self, that God is working from within, and therefore God is working on behalf of God's self and for God's people. For if we are free to be for ourselves, if we are set free on the inside, free to be true to ourselves, free to be for ourselves, then we can be, work and play beginning from within. We no longer need to protect ourselves from the outside because we are free within and moving out, not the outside moving in. Surely barriers can come down and defensiveness left behind.

We can see how this relates to the fact that Jesus was accompanied. Is being accompanied being set free from within? God accompanying us means always "on the way" with us, never leaving us but standing with and beside us. That means honouring us, our feelings, our decisions, our selves as autonomous -- separate human beings who have hearts and souls, who think. Perhaps that is what accompaniment means: to stand beside and with, honouring the other to live from within outwards, respecting the autonomy or self-government of the other to flow outwards from within. In God's own freedom, God

works from within outwards. We know this because Jesus worked from within outwards. And in working from within outwards, God tells us how much God loves us and stands with us.

Was Jesus accompanied? It has been said that "...God is to be known primarily in the preaching of the crucified Christ. The cross functions here not as an instrument of atonement but as the vehicle of revelation."³² We must look to the cross to see whether Jesus was accompanied. By the definition we have been using, Jesus was accompanied on the cross. Certainly we can say that the Father stood alongside the cross enduring the death of his son. Is that accompaniment? Enduring, going through, experiencing -- yes, is not that what has been talked about, what is talked about in scripture? Standing with, accompanying, standing alongside, honouring the other, going through and experiencing alongside as Jesus was on that cross. It was accompaniment without taking over, which is the most difficult thing to do for another. Standing beside, honouring -- without usurping the other's self and autonomy.

This accompaniment, this alongsidedness of another, is what we saw in the Trinity, in the doctrine of God. Just as the three "persons" of the Trinity stand alongside each other in the relationship of perichoresis, so also they stand alongside one another in the earthly life of the Son. The Father and Holy Spirit never attempt to usurp the Son's autonomous self-governing by either yanking him down from the cross or running away. They stand alongside him in his decision to die for the people, while undergoing their own agonies in his death as well. They neither usurp power by brute force nor by manipulative abandonment. They simply grieve alongside him as fellow

members of this divine perichoretic relationship.

While it is true that, in the stories of the cross, we do not see the Father and Holy Spirit actually "standing" alongside, we cannot make the fatal mistake of thinking they are quite divorced from the situation, unfeelingly sitting back and anaesthetized in their divine unity. In the history of the church, the cross has inevitably pointed to emotions within God, be they ones of wrath or suffering. The difference here is that each "person" in the divine perichoretic unity experiences the death of the second "person", that the Father and Holy Spirit suffer in the alongsidedness of the perichoretic relationship. Rather than making the emphasis of the cross be on human beings and their sinfulness, albeit true, the emphasis now is on God and the divine perichoretic relationship. To use Barth's own method, we have concentrated on God and not ourselves. We have let God be God.

This perichoretic alongsidedness has enormous implications for us as human beings. No longer does autonomy mean a self-government which stands in complete independence from others. No longer does autonomy mean a self-government which pushes the other away out of fear of dependence. No longer does autonomy mean a self-government which disregards the presence of others. Autonomy, as we have seen in the Trinity, is a self-government while standing in relationship. Autonomy is an interdependence. Autonomy is being alongside others.

This requires us to reform our understanding of what it means to humans under the lordship of God -- what it means for human relations under the lordship of the perichoretic relationship. We must work on behalf of structures which enhance and affirm human interdependence, i.e., relationships of alongsidedness. We must honestly look at

ourselves, our immediate relationships and our global village and work for autonomous interdependence which enhances those relationships. God neither asks us to become power brokers nor doormats in our human relationships. God does ask us to take responsibility, to maintain autonomous relationships which enhance our "ability to respond". This redefinition of God's trinitarian relationship and thus our autonomous interdependence necessarily requires a new look at providence and power.

C. Providence and Power

To Calvin Barth says: "Our God is sovereign, powerful, omniscient and omnipotent, and to know what those words mean, look to the man on the cross." To Gilkey Barth says: "Our God knows modern contingency, relativity, transience and autonomy, and to change God to suit human purposes is only to elevate our own human knowledge to divine knowledge. To find meaning in the modern world you must look to the man on the cross."³³ Whether we use philosophical/intellectual concepts or our own human experience, Barth constantly and consistently directs our gaze away from ourselves to the man on the cross. There we see, in the most radical way, how to define every attribute of God and meaning in the midst of this world. No concept, human experience, understanding of history or nature can ever tell us more than something about ourselves. We will not learn who God is nor, in fact, our truly radical contingency unless we look to the man on the cross. In him we learn the truth. In him we learn reality. In him we find meaning.³⁴

If we gain meaning for our lives from what we see, from our

modern historical consciousness, then we take very human understandings and knowledge and construct idols. To be sure, the idols will change from age to age, but they will be idols nonetheless. They may be idols of philosophical ideals of God's omnipotence and omniscience or they may be idols of the human experience of contingency and relativity. They may perhaps be the idols of "the information age." But idols they are: human concepts, experience and values raised to their highest degree. But the man on the cross will not succumb to our human definition of God. He will not allow us to look once and look away, only to construct our personal golden calves. He calls, he demands of us that we begin with him.

Barth clearly walks a different line than Calvin or Gilkey. While Reformed, Barth refuses to define God's sovereignty and providence in absolute philosophical terms which do not begin with Christ. While also Reformed, Barth refuses to define God's sovereignty and providence by changing God to suit modern minds and experience. Barth defines God's sovereignty and providence by looking to Jesus Christ, to the man on the cross. Clearly Reformed. Clearly modern.

It has been said that Barth is both child and critic of the Enlightenment,³⁵ and it might equally be said that Barth is both child and critic of the Reformation. But for Barth the decision was not to decide between the two as if God and modernity were locked in a pitched battle. Far from Gilkey's conception of the Reformed understanding of God versus modernity, Barth maintains a fundamentally different beginning and reference point from which to construct his model of the Christian faith, and so is equal to the task of reforming

the Reformation faith while firmly standing in the modern era. While Calvin reformed the church of the 16th century, Barth reforms Calvin. In so doing, he speaks to modern people.

It is clear that Calvin was no Stoic philosopher, not simply because he fought their influence on Christianity but because he never accepted their pantheism. His understanding of God's transcendence and the Trinity are far from Stoicism. God could never be confused with nature. What is evident, however, is that the humanistic understanding of God is so similar to Calvin's as to make one wonder just how much of Stoicism Calvin unknowingly included in his own theology. Definitely he protested against Stoicism. But could he have protested too much? In damning the tide of Stoicism, Calvin allowed it to influence him sufficiently that it provided a kind of soil which would incline him to prefer or have an interest in certain biblical themes to the exclusion of other themes which might have moderated the overall shape of his doctrine of providence.³⁶

What remains of Stoicism in Calvin's theology is a kind of determinism which is closer to fate, despite Calvin's resistance, than to the freedom and assurance of the Gospel. Even Seneca stated that though the name be changed, it is still the same "Divine Reason that pervades the whole universe",³⁷ and one can reasonably claim that to a degree Calvin has simply changed the name. Partee is correct in his assessments that

first, Calvin explicitly rejected the Stoic idea of Fate, believing that man has to deal essentially with a loving, and therefore provident, God who is both his Creator and Redeemer. Second, Calvin did not deny but in his own way affirmed man's freedom of will. Third, Calvin, of course, thought that his position was preeminently Biblical and also Augustinian and not to affirm it was to attack the heart of

the faith....³⁸

The question, nevertheless, remains as to whether Calvin's God is a true understanding of the Lord we find in scripture, or perhaps a mixture of humanism and scripture. Although he has significantly distanced himself from humanism and insisted on a highly personal God, both Calvin and Stoicism continued to share a belief in determinism, if couched in different names.

The fact that God is personal is a crucial element of Calvin's fight with Stoicism. He significantly moved in the direction of a personal God. What is more important here, however, is that the determinism remains.³⁹

Throughout Barth's understanding of providence we saw his acknowledgement of the problems chance and fate presented to the doctrine. He repeated the questions brought up by the Lutherans and Reformers which, in more modern language, reiterates Calvin's problems with the doctrine. Calvin, however, in his attempt to claim some distance from Epicureanism and Stoicism found it much harder to maintain a distance from fate. Barth, on the other hand, runs the same risk, yet makes no one happy. He maintains a middle ground which few agree exists.

Barth's agenda, however, was totally different than Calvin's. He could not make use of any concept until it was defined by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. While Calvin used or discarded the concepts given by philosophers as they came to him, Barth could not so easily take them up and put them to use. It is the case of Calvin's use, however unintentional, of philosophical concepts which points up Barth's movement from the particular to the general, his

particularism,⁴⁰ which is illustrated here.

Barth understood all of theology to be derived from the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. This was the beginning point from which to discuss theology. This particular event and our understanding of it defined every word or concept used in theology. Thus, one cannot take any word or concept, from philosophy, sociology or any other religion and make use of it as it comes. It must be transformed by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

For example, Barth does not use words like "Father" and "Lord" in some general way. He does not understand "Father" from what human beings know from their earthly fathers, nor from a general concept called "fatherhood." We may not derive our notions of God the Father from any other place or person, as if "fatherhood" was a common term which everyone could understand and from which everyone could begin and thus move forward to God the Father. "Father" is defined only by the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must look to Jesus Christ and see just how he tells us about this particular Father to know anything about a general concept called father. We must begin with the particular and move to the general. This was a distinctive and consistent element in Barth's theology.

Thus, in his doctrine of providence, Barth refuses to begin with what humanity understands by "providential." He does not discuss what God's providence saves us from or guides us to. He begins with God's eternal election of grace in Jesus Christ. That event determines providence. Thus, providence can be called "the results of the eternal election of grace."⁴¹

It has been suggested that Calvin's main position was one of

special providence, with general providence a subsidiary of it.⁴² This is most likely true. While Calvin was certainly interested in the general running of the earth and all the various aspects of it, he was most interested in individual human lives and how God related to them. Although Calvin acknowledged the creation of the heavens and the wonderfulness of God's wisdom,⁴³ he repeatedly spoke of human life in specific terms, in such a way that the comfort of the believer was of paramount importance. Whether falling into the hands of thieves along the road or meeting with an untimely death, Calvin wanted believers to be comforted by the fact that God had their whole life in God's hands. Nothing was outside of God's care and concern.⁴⁴ As he said, "Gratitude of mind for the favorable outcome of things, patience in adversity, and also incredible freedom from worry about the future all necessarily follow upon this knowledge."⁴⁵

Calvin indeed believed that particular providence was prior to universal providence. The crucial point here is, however, that particular providence for Calvin was God's care and concern for individuals. For Barth, providence is the outward manifestation of the eternal election of grace in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Calvin could speak of providence in much the same way as the Stoics and people in general. Providence was God's care and concern for both individuals and all life on earth. Barth could not do this. Because providence stemmed ultimately from the eternal election of grace in Jesus Christ, there was no common ground with philosophers, religions or any general human belief in the care and concern of God for both individuals and the world and inferring the providential care of God. Providence is looking at the cross and resurrection of Jesus

Christ and knowing God's providence in it. "[Providence] is always a matter of recognition from within outwards, from the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ to all other occurrence, from God's grace to the world of its addresses and recipients."⁴⁶ Thus, while Calvin's doctrine of providence could be one of fixedness, and Gilkey's lack of such gives rise to ceaseless flux, Barth's doctrine is one of fidelity to the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ.

Just as Barth would have nothing to do with a general concept of providence even in the particularity of God's love for individuals, so also he would have nothing to do with a general concept of predestination. Election or predestination was not primarily concerned with the election of individuals to salvation and others to perdition. Election was not a deterministic concept, personal as it may be. Predestination is the election of Jesus Christ. It is particular in that one man, and only in him can election be understood. There is no general concept of election which is later related to Christ. Christ is election. Election, first, last and always, is the election of Jesus Christ. Only after that is announced can we see where we stand in him.

Thus, we can see that while Calvin doctrine of providence is theocentric, Barth's doctrine is christocentric. This also enabled Calvin to have a providence of God hidden behind Jesus Christ, or a hidden God of whom humanity may know nothing. Although desperately wanting to maintain a Christocentric faith, Calvin's unintentional mix of his philosophical knowledge with his Christocentric reform of the 16th century makes for a theocentric faith which does not fully come to grips with the all-encompassing relevance of Jesus Christ.

To this we can add that while Calvin is theocentric, Gilkey's attempt at theology is anthropocentric. To both Barth must set limits. To both Barth must demand reform, for while the Christian faith must speak of God and must speak later of humankind, it must first and foremost speak of God's own self-revelation in the midst of us, Jesus Christ.

It is also true that Calvin believed that he was indebted to his experience given by the Holy Spirit.⁴⁷ Calvin used his own experience, both of the providential character of God and the fact that not all receive the good news of the Gospel and are thus elect, to maintain providence and predestination. While not the foundation of either doctrine, certainly his experience led him to certain conclusions that helped to further and maintain his doctrines.

In his doctrine of providence Barth speaks of "signs" of God's providence which could be taken as experiential. He reminded us, however, that even these "certain constant elements" only point to that which is greater. They do not ground God's providence but they point to God and God's providence in Jesus Christ.

The more crucial element, however, is the fact that Barth has shown that using human experience as one source of the doctrines of providence and predestination would be fatal to their Christian understanding. Human experience is just that: human. By its nature it cannot reveal to the world the nature of God. The human response to the Gospel cannot proclaim the nature of God. To do so would make both doctrines dependent upon humanity and humanity's acceptance or rejection. They would not be dependent on God. Thus, as Barth saw, the rejection of the Gospel would become an equal partner with

acceptance. The human ability to reject the Gospel becomes equal to, if not overpowering, God's proclamation of acceptance. It is a question of whether or not human actions decide anything concerning God's proclamation of the Gospel.

One must, however, put the question to Barth, "Do you think you rose above your experience in writing your theology?" And an equally important question must be "Can and should we rise above our experience?" Barth would say that we must allow our experience to be submitted to the Word of God. Although Barth brought theology back to the one Word of God, I question whether he did this with human beings. This is one of the unresolved questions this thesis has raised.

It is indeed important to show that God reveals God's self truly and completely in Jesus Christ, and that we cannot base our understanding of God solely on our experience. Human experience cannot determine God. But we also must take human experience seriously.

The questions of philosophy and experience bring to the fore one of the crucial questions in theology, a question which highlights the distinction between Calvin and Barth: Where do we begin in our discussion of theology? Do we begin with our important, albeit human, questions, or do we begin with God's revelation in Jesus Christ? There is no evidence from Barth that human experience is not important or valid. He will not, however, make human experience the measure of all things.⁴⁸

Calvin and Barth agree that scripture is where we turn to listen and hear God's word to us, but they do not agree with what we are to bring to our reading and listening. If we bring our experience and

human wisdom to scripture and attempt to read scripture in light of our wisdom, then scripture becomes whatever we want it to. It justifies our themes and axioms. It becomes a tool in our hands to be used for whatever we think important.

One example where Barth's own experience most definitely is evident is the crucial element of distinction between Calvin and Barth, the fact that the Enlightenment stands between them.⁴⁹ The changes in human knowledge and understanding which came about during the 17th and 18th centuries were monumental. The new sciences, especially, drove a wedge between human reason and theology, and often demanded a decision for one or the other. The two could not be reconciled.

Attempts at their reconciliation came in the late 18th and 19th centuries with the rise of liberal Christianity, especially in F. Schleiermacher. He wanted to reconcile Christian orthodoxy with the scientific gains of the Enlightenment centuries. His was a synthesis between orthodoxy and the Enlightenment -- to be Christian and modern at the same time.⁵⁰

While Barth disagreed with Schleiermacher, he did not return to a 17th century orthodoxy. He, too, sought to speak to modern Christians, but without capitulating his Christianity. He thus wrote theology that took seriously the advancements of the Enlightenment without worshipping them.⁵¹ *"Barth's theology is a restatement of Reformed theology written in the aftermath of the Enlightenment but not capitulating to it."*⁵²

Thus, we can say that Barth agrees with Gilkey that the Christian faith must be restated in the modern era, taking into account modern

problems. He agrees with Gilkey that the problems of contingency and relativity must be addressed. But he would not allow contingency and relativity to become the hub around which all Christian doctrines must revolve. To do so is to worship ourselves. No. To be Reformed and modern, we must look to the man on the cross.

This knowledge, this looking to the man on the cross, affects us at the core of our being. When one is affected at the core of one's being, one begins to understand. When it grabs one's viscera, understanding begins. Have we been laid hold of by the object of the doctrine, where we have apprehended and understood it from within? God grabs us, the object of the doctrine of providence takes hold of us, and somehow we respond from within and we "understand". This is no program. We "understand" that through all that happens, whether in our own lives or the life of the world, we "understand" that God is present, working, leading and loving us. We understand with our viscera.

God grasps us in our depths and we understand. When God grasps us it is grasping us for God's self; it is an experience of grace. Grace is not necessarily how things have gone our way, but how God has grasped us for God's self.

Like Jacob at the River Jabbok we have been blessed, and in this is also great pain. God grasps us for God's own and in being grasped we are both understood and we understand. When God grasps us deep down we must give up all pretension, knowledge or otherwise, and when that happens we understand. When God grasps us deep down we give up all notions of lordship ourselves and God becomes our Lord. We have been wounded -- God has known what is deepest in us and we are aware

of it -- but in being wounded we have been blessed. We walk with a limp but with understanding. We are wounded but made whole.

When we understand from within, we do not need to ask "Why?" We bow down and worship God. There, in the understanding itself, is a certain feeling of creatureliness, a feeling that that is my God whom we worship and adore. We do not need to ask "Why?" It does not even come up. Instead, it is more "the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job 1:21) We are God's creatures and God loves us and whatever happens, God is loving us in and through it. It is worship and doxology.

We not only understand that God is Lord and Father, but also that God understands us, that we understand each other. We have an intimate relationship with one another. Our viscera meet and know one another for understanding is visceral. We are soul-mates. In so doing, God is truly graceful -- allowing God's creatures to become God's soul-mates. To allow God's creatures to love God. To allow God's creatures to walk with a limp, to stand behind a rock as God's glory passes, to see God "face to face", and yet live.

Barth says that because the Christian has been laid hold of, has this relationship, knowledge and understanding from within, divine providence and lordship are reflected in the Christian through faith, obedience and prayer.⁵³ In other words, because the Christian walks with a limp, divine providence is reflected through faith, obedience and prayer.

Just as it happens, upon being grasped, that we have been and are known, that we must bow down and worship, so it is with faith -- we are set free from our own agenda to follow our Lord's. Faith is

complete enslavement and complete freedom. It is one and the same; the tension must be held. Faith is an action word. It is a participation in being grasped.

Faith is movement from what is revealed to what is hidden and back again. Faith is action. Faith is abandoning oneself in favour of the one who has found you.⁵⁴ Faith is viewing life from within outwards, from Scripture outwards. This cannot be counted quantitatively. Barth says it must be real faith, i.e., participating in Jesus Christ and drawing implications from that. What a different way of looking at the world. Faith is not concerned with "how much". It is movement from what is revealed -- participating in Jesus Christ -- to what is hidden -- the implications of it -- and back -- to Christ. It is not concerned with quantity but with movement, with participation. It has nothing to do with how much one affirms the Word. It is simply participation -- not how often or in what way -- simply participation.

It is complete enslavement and complete liberation. Enslavement because one is "separated and consecrated to participate in Jesus Christ".⁵⁵ Demands are made and demand obedience. One must abandon oneself to the one who has found you.⁵⁵ Complete liberation because the creature no longer has to be Lord. One is established as a human being and acquires a Lord. It is living in the tension of enslavement and liberation.

Obedience, too, is living in tension. With faith it is the tension between enslavement and liberation, and with obedience it is freedom and demand. We are always "between", knowing how God has revealed God's self to us and grasps us for God's self, and how this

must work itself out. Being grasped is being "in between", it is the already and the not yet. It is the recognition that all has been revealed but we are incapable of understanding and doing. It is the grace of being grasped and of knowing that we are loved and adored for who we are, and the challenge of being called to work the work of God in a world we cannot understand. The freedom of knowing that it is the Holy Spirit who works, who does the real work of God's kingdom, who set us free to participate, and the demand that we listen and do what the Holy Spirit commands. We are grasped, brought out of ourselves, taken hold of as God's children (1John 3:2), secured in that knowledge, love and faith (God's knowledge, understanding, love and faith), and set free. We are also called to participate in this, in God's freedom and love in this world. We are called to be God's children now -- both now in that we dare not tarry, and children in that we may never take control, never attempt to be called as leaders -- only as participants. We must return and keep in our vision the leader, the Lord, who shows us how we are to be obedient in each situation. We cannot rely on external standards. We must rely on God.

We also must remember that obedience, as with faith, begins with the cross of Christ. Only in the light of faith in Jesus Christ can we be obedient. Only in participation in Jesus Christ can we be obedient.

In participation in Jesus Christ we also pray. Christ took the position of claiming nothing and asking everything, and so also we do the same. We indeed have nothing and we come before God knowing that. We also come before God knowing that all we can do is ask, and because

Jesus did this before us and trusted in the deepest way possible, we are given the freedom to come and do likewise. We hear the good news that God has acted with and for the creature, and in that knowledge we come to God in prayer.

Faith, obedience and prayer point us to the power of God, for the power of God is not the power which comes and usurps power. It is not the power which takes away Jesus' autonomy, even on the cross. Even in his cry, "My God, Where Are You, Why have You Left Me?!", the Father did not come and take away Jesus' humanity -- his own personhood from inside. We would think that rescuing Jesus from the cross would be the most conclusive evidence of power. Perhaps instead it would have been the conclusive evidence of taking away even his own son's situation. Instead, true accompaniment means not taking over. Power is found in accompaniment.

God stands alongside us and does not take over control, as the Father stood beside Jesus on the cross but never yanked him off. Thus, power may be re-defined by standing-alongside rather than rescuing. Even Jesus did not grab the woman caught in adultery and pull her out of the line of fire. No, he stood alongside her by reminding the rock-throwers that they stand alongside her as well. We all stand together -- perhaps that is what Christians know that non-Christians do not.

The glory of the particular relation and attitude of the Christian to the universal lordship of God consists in the fact that it does not give occasion for any glorying in self. It begins and ends with the laying aside of all claim to self-glory. The height of the Christian in this matter is always the depth - and it is no height at all, but a very real depth - of the reality with which he can and may and must and will stand towards the fact that as a creature he is in no sense superior to other men or to the dust under his feet, but can exist only under the universal lordship of

God. Whatever advantage he may have over other men - and he really has a very big advantage - he has it only under the continually present and actual presupposition that as a creature he has no advantage at all.⁵⁷

We are not any better off with God, we are not any less sinful, any purer in front of God. We simply know that we all stand together before God and that Jesus himself stands with us before the Father. That is power. Surely we will stand before the Father in the end and our true, honest selves will be known for what they are. We will not have to hide (remember the Garden of Eden) because everything will be known for what it is and Jesus will be standing alongside. We can be honest and true because of it. In the honest and truthfulness we will be cleansed, as Jesus Christ stands alongside us.

If power is standing-alongside-of, then power is not force. Power is standing alongside of the little ones, the lost, the lame, the least of the world. Not making their decisions for them, but standing with, being a fellow traveller. Power is listening to ourselves, giving ourselves space, giving ourselves permission to relax -- all of which, when it happens, empowers us to be with, to stand by others. Power is not telling but listening. Power is not speaking but hearing. Power is not taking over but standing alongside. Power empowers; it does not destroy. Power is a non-coercive relationship.

Thus the creature is truly free. It is not so much a polemic against God as tyrant and the need to see humanity as in control, as it is a realization that true freedom is found in God's freedom to be with and for the creature. If true freedom is found in God's freedom and God's freedom is to be alongside the creature as seen in Jesus

Christ, it also means that human freedom means to be with and for God as seen in Jesus Christ. This by no means signifies a leaning towards the rather crass "Christian" assumption of "God is on our side" which permeates, to some degree, every conceivable aspect of the Christian spectrum. Instead, it may call us to a fresh insight into what it really means to be with and for God, perhaps a new commitment to be with and for God's people, as seen in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We will have to take seriously Luke 15:1-2, "This man receives sinners and eats with them," along with the cross and resurrection.

Predestination, as well, is not human power raised to the highest degree but is God's prior decision on behalf of God's people, everyone of whom he walks with down the streets and alley ways of life. Power is not something to be held for that alienates us from others. Power is seen in brokenness, in weakness. "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2Cor. 12:9 RSV) The power of predestination has nothing to do with the decrees to save some and reject the rest. It has everything to do with God incarnate, the man on the cross, the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."⁵⁹

If we take that lamb seriously, we know that God has not accommodated God's self to the world in the sense of showing the world something God is not. God has not shown only one aspect of many to God's creatures. In the lamb of God we see and know what is God's prior decision about us. If we take seriously the verse "the lamb slain from the foundation of the world" then we acknowledge the crucifixion as interior to God, as the outward sign of the invisible God. It is God revealing God's very self to us.

That lamb, that crucifixion, is the definition of providence. In the lamb slain, God has passed over us and not counted our sins against us. This is who God is and what God's providence is. If it were only God's accommodation to humanity's weaknesses, then we have not met the real God and can never put faith in God and God's promises. But it is the real and true God. We can trust the promises.

ENDNOTES -- CHAPTER 7

¹Cf. *Institutes*, I.10.

²Cf. FN #9 in Chapter 1 and E.A. Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*, Columbia Univ. Press, New York, 1952, p. 50, on subjective and objective knowledge of God.

³G. Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 1991. pp. 35-6.

⁴I/1/296.

⁵III/2/218.

⁶I/1/371. Hunsinger says: "His [Barth's] decisive move was simply to restate a conviction which had long been implicit in the Christian tradition, namely, that God's being in relation to the human creature was no different from God's being in relation to itself. God's identity in history was essentially the same as God's identity in eternity, for otherwise God would not have engaged in an act of self-revelation, that is, God's essential identity would not have been disclosed. Given this analysis, Barth could argue that God's eternal being in and for itself could be inferred from God's being as enacted for and among us in history." *Op. cit.*, p. 36. Hartwell says: "Barth conceives of this specific divine act of revelation in this way that the Triune God Himself is 'in unimpaired unity yet also in unimpaired difference' Revealer, Revelation and Revealedness. He means thereby that it is God the Father who in His eternity before the creation of the world decided to reveal Himself to man in His Son Jesus Christ; that it is God the Son who in obedience to this eternal decree of His Father executes and objectifies this revelation in His own person and work in that He assumed human nature in the man Jesus of Nazareth and, living and dying as a man among His fellow-men and for their salvation, accomplished the work of reconciliation which according to Barth's teaching has also and primarily a distinctly revelatory character; and that it is God the Holy Spirit who consummates this revelation by making man open and ready for it so that man is capable of receiving it and actually receives it." (Herbert Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth: an Introduction*, Duckworth and Co., Ltd., London, 1964, pp. 68-9.)

⁷II/1/51.

⁸II/1/51. Hunsinger says to this: "...God is revealed in God's unity and entirety. Nothing essential of God's identity ever needs to be sought elsewhere, Barth argued, than in Jesus Christ, God's definitive, final, and binding act of self-revelation. There is no God apart from, beyond, or behind God as God is in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, God's being is present in its unity and entirety. There is no hidden God beyond the revealed God. The hidden God and the revealed God are essentially one and the same. The hiddenness of God

is given in and with God's self-revelation, and God's self-revelation does not exclude but includes God's hiddenness." *Op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁹"Christian theology has to do with the one God who is personally and always related to his creation in three ways." (John Leith, *Introduction to the Reformed Tradition*, John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1978, p. 95.)

¹⁰Cf. J. Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, San Francisco, Harper and Row Publishers, 1974; and *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1981.

¹¹J. Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1974, pp. 150-2.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 243.

¹³*The Concise English Dictionary*, Omega Books, 1984, p. 72.

¹⁴This raises the question as to whether Barth consistently begins with Jesus Christ when he deals with human relationships. This question, however, does not pertain to the matter at hand.

¹⁵Parker was correct in posing the debate this way. (T.H.L. Parker, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh, 1952, p. 1.)

¹⁶Postema, while arguing for a natural theology in Calvin, argues also for a "propositional knowledge", "even apart from God." While he recognizes that Calvin was not interested in this propositional knowledge, and indeed spoke against it, he says, "Nevertheless, apart from faith, I maintain, some knowledge about God is possible. This is to say, the various arguments that natural theology has constructed for centuries (from the Greeks on) are not *a priori* meaningless. Granted, they are insufficient in so far as they cannot lead to a 'true knowledge of God', but that is only to say that faith is more than intellectual assent to a true proposition.." ("Calvin's Alleged Rejection of Natural Theology", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 24, 1971, p. 431.)

¹⁷E. Grislis, "Calvin's Use of Cicero in the *Institutes* I:1-5 -- A Case Study in Theological Method", (*Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 62, 1971), p. 33.

¹⁸E. Grislis, "Admittedly, in the introductory chapters of the *Institutes* Calvin does not propose a clearly delineated three-fold use of man's natural knowledge of God. Yet while an explicit formula is absent, the discussion appears to anticipate just such a three-fold shape. To begin with, as in the first use of the law, natural knowledge of God convicts men of their idolatry and unbelief. Yet, insofar as Calvin defines the knowledge of God and man as correlative, he appears to have hinted at that moving toward grace which is the role of judgment in the first use of the law. Secondly (and predominantly in the first five chapters of the *Institutes*), natural

knowledge convicts man as having forsaken God. Here, as in the case of the second use of the law, we may recognize that kind of restraining function which does not allow the unbeliever to rest happily within his present condition. Finally, natural knowledge of God has a very positive role in regard to the believers -- and quite similar to the third use of the law. Once men have been cleansed and illuminated by the Holy Spirit, nature provides very useful information and thus exhorts them in their Christian life." *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹³"In any event, I suggest that a major clue for interpreting Calvin's understanding of man's natural knowledge of God can be obtained when Calvin's classical (in this case Ciceronian) heritage is delineated and his own corrections of it are clearly noted. A correlation between classical learning and Christian doctrine then becomes visible and Calvin's approach to theology emerges in clearer light." Grislis, *Ibid.*, pp. 35-6.

²⁰III/2/220.

²¹II/1/453.

²²I/2/118.

²³Barth, *Against the Stream*, London, SCM Press Ltd., 1954, pp. 211-12.

²⁴Barth, "The Christian Understanding of Revelation", *Against the Stream*, *Ibid.*, pp. 208-9. Hunsinger says: "...when Barth wants to describe the living God in a technical way, he says that God's being is always a being in act. Negatively, this means that God's being cannot be described apart from the basic act in which God lives. Any attempt to define God in static or inactive terms, as is customary in certain theologies and philosophies, is therefore to be rejected. Positively, the description means that God lives in a set of active relations. The being of God in act is a being in love and freedom....For God is alive in the active relations of love and freedom which constitute God's being in and for itself. These are the active relations of God's trinitarian self-differentiation. From all eternity the Father loves the Son, and the Son loves the Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit....God is the Lord, the acting subject, of this self-constituting, mysterious event." *Op. cit.*, p. 30. Hartwell says: "The root-cause of Barth's actualism is to be found in his relentless endeavour to safeguard a twofold truth which he continually posits and expounds in his theology, namely the truth of the freedom of God as the sovereign Lord and of His grace in His aseity and in all His works, in revelation as well as in election, creation, reconciliation and redemption, and, therefore, in His whole relationship with man and the further truth of man's constant need of God's initiative and continual action in man's relationship with God and with his fellow-men in face of man's incapability of knowing God, the world and himself and of acting in accordance with that knowledge on the strength of his own faculties. In view of this twofold truth Barth denies that man can either noetically or ontically take hold of

God and His works, making them the object of his own independent contemplation and interpretation and possessing, controlling and manipulating them according to his own intentions and desires. God would no longer be God, revelation would no longer be revelation, and grace would no longer be grace if man were able to do this, and it is precisely because God is God and because man (according to this teaching) does not possess this ability that Barth jealously watches over the independence of God and of His revelation in Jesus Christ from the world and from man and over the freedom of God's grace. It is for the same reasons that he fights a constant battle against all natural theology and against the *analogia entis* in particular." *Op. cit.*, p. 37.

²⁵IV/1/80-1; Cf. Hartwell, *Op. cit.*, pp. 50-1.

²⁶III/2/220.

²⁷This also critiques Sallie McFague's book, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological Nuclear Age* (SCM Press, Ltd., London, 1987). In it she attempts to move beyond a theology which she believes does not speak to our era and which demands that if we look at Jesus on the cross as our paradigm then we must also find new metaphors with which to understand him.

She says that if Jesus is the paradigm, the gospel is "destabilizing" (p. 50), and we must seek new metaphors which go along with this. No longer may we use the monarchical model of kingship but ones of mother, lover and friend.

I believe that the question is not one of dropping one set of metaphors for another, because we still use words like power, freedom, autonomy and relationship in our common life and because we have not understood them correctly to begin with. While I agree with McFague and others that the prevailing understanding of all theological words until relatively recently has been patriarchal, and that perspectives from women can only enhance our mutual understanding of theology and thus our common human life, I do not agree that dropping words such as "king" are necessarily to be discarded. What must happen is that we reform those words by allowing Jesus Christ to define them, not we ourselves, either women or men. Jesus Christ reforms our understanding of the Christian faith and our common life in every age and era, and we must submit to it in our own. This means to allow Jesus Christ to reform our ideas of power and autonomy, traditionally words which men use against women, into words which, as we see, enrich our common life precisely because Christ is their author.

²⁸G. Kaufman (*Theology for a Nuclear Age*, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1985) sets up his critique by reminding us of the horrors of the 20th century, with the conclusion that the sovereignty of God must be an illusion of the past.

"I am asking readers to consider whether the new situation in which humanity now finds itself -- in which we are able, by the press of a button, to destroy our entire world as well as humankind itself -- isn't in a significant way 'out of sync' with the central traditional claim about God's sovereignty over the world. The notion of God's sovereignty seems to have become fundamentally irrelevant to

understanding what we should do in the new situation in which we find ourselves -- it is unclear how it can bear on our problems one way or the other -- and yet belief in the divine sovereignty was at the very heart of traditional faith. Thus a significant tension -- a logical tension -- is set up between our intuition or feeling that humankind has moved into a thoroughly new and radically unique situation and the traditional claims about the meaning and importance of trusting ourselves fully to the love and care of God. In these chapters I have tried to articulate just what this tension is and when it has come, and I have proposed a reconception of God and of Jesus Christ -- and thus of Christian faith and salvation -- which I think addresses and dissolves it." (pp. ix-x)

This is a re-conception of the Christian faith which attempts to do justice to modern problems and the 20th century situation. While admirable in his understanding of the reality of the nuclear age, Kaufman so re-defines God and Christ that, while not only unrecognizable, but like Gilkey, God and Christ have been re-made into humankind's image of what humankind would like for a God and a saviour. While I believe we cannot deny any of the stark realities of our nuclear age, neither can we re-define God into our own image. Christian theology is not looking out the window, seeing our own problems, and reconstructing God into what we think God ought to be, but taking our experiences of the modern age to the man on the cross and listening to his critique.

²⁹Cf. Mt. 12:1f.

³⁰Lk. 15:1-2.

³¹"The work of the Holy Spirit to which this result is due is characterized by Barth as man's liberation from blindness and bondage to sin. It consists in the creation of man's 'freedom' which is very different from what man regards as his freedom. This concept of man's freedom, which with Barth is once more a theological and not a philosophical one, plays a vital part in many aspects of his theology, especially in his ethics. It is man's freedom *for* God, that is, his freedom to turn to God, to believe in Him and to obey, love and praise Him, in short, his freedom to be a child of God, a dimension which man, sinful man, does not possess of himself but which is created by the work of the Holy Spirit in man, enabling him to receive God's revelation in Jesus Christ in faith and to live by that faith." Hartwell, *Op. cit.*, p. 86.

³²Charles Cousar, *Interpretation*, April, 1990, p. 172.

³³"His [Barth's] who theology pivots around two events in one man's life-story, the crucifixion and resurrection...." (D.F. Ford, "Barth's Interpretation of the Bible", *Karl Barth: Studies of Theological Method*, ed., S.W. Sykes, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1979, p. 70.)

³⁴"The Christian claim is that the presence of God in Jesus Christ does more justice to the facts of life, makes more sense out of life, and gives more meaning to life than any other 'revelation'

whatsoever." (J. Leith, *Op. cit.*, p. 89.)

"This appreciation of God's freedom to surprise us by expressing universal truth in a personal and particular way is at the root of Barth's rejection of most post-Enlightenment world-views. The latter insisted on finding more general frames of reference (whether universal history, man's individual, social, religious, or political development, or some other frame) into which the biblical history was either fitted or not, whereas Barth sees God's acts as the context in which all other events are to be understood. The whole *Church Dogmatics* can be seen as an attempt to think through the implications of this for Christian faith, knowledge, and practice in all areas of life." (D.F. Ford, *Op. cit.*, p. 64.)

³⁵B. Ramm, *After Fundamentalism*, Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1983, p. 14.

³⁶D.M. Edwards says that Calvinism's "divine omnipotence is but little removed from the inexorable *εἰμαρμένη* (Fate) of Stoicism or *Kismet* of Mohammedanism, and men become mere pawns in the hands of the Almighty. It takes Sovereignty in abstraction from God's total Being as Father-King; it isolates His will from His whole nature and character." *Christianity and Philosophy*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1932). Charles Partee, in his article "Calvin and Determinism", (*Christian Scholar's Review*, 5, 1975) disagrees wholeheartedly with this assessment. While it may indeed be possible, as we shall see, that Edwards is a bit strong in his assessment, Partee bases his argument on Calvin's experience.

³⁷Seneca, *De Benefic*, vi.4 - vii.1. Seneca, *Moral Essays*, III. (Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1935), p. 217.

³⁸Partee, "Calvin and Determinism", p. 123.

³⁹Partee attempts to discount the notion that Calvin might have any similarity with Stoic determinism. He claims that "The proper conclusion is that the Stoics produced a mechanistic cosmology while Calvin expounded a providential theology." ("Calvin and Determinism", p. 128). While it may be correct to say that the Stoics had a mechanistic cosmology, it might be closer to the truth to say that Calvin had a mechanistic theology. It was a fixed theology. He definitely had a theology different from any particular cosmology for the sovereignty of God was primary. It was not, however, different enough from Stoic humanism to be truly alongside and not mechanistic. It remained fixed and could not take into account the relational aspect of God.

⁴⁰Hunsinger lays out six motifs which are found throughout Barth's theology and which better help readers understand him than locating his theology under any one single rubric. These motifs are actualism, particularism, objectivism, personalism, realism and rationalism. Each has a specific definition within Barth's theology. These motifs will be made use of extensively in order to clarify

Barth's theology and to point up the differences between Calvin and Barth. *Op. cit.*

⁴¹The title of Chapter 6, on Barth's doctrine of providence.

⁴²Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*, (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1977), pp. 126ff.

⁴³I. 5. 1-2; I. 14. 20.

⁴⁴Cf. I. 6-11.

⁴⁵I. 17. 7.

⁴⁶III/3/54.

⁴⁷Partee, "Calvin and Experience", *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 26, 1973, p. 174.

⁴⁸Hartwell says: "G. Wingren, in his criticism of the Word of God as the sole basis of Barth's theology, fails to realize that the latter's path to knowledge in theology is not determined by any preconceived negative concept of man, in particular a presupposed incapacity of man to know God and His will apart from Scripture, but by his theological interpretation, based on the exegesis of the Bible itself, of what, in the light of the resurrection, has taken place at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. It is precisely as a result of this theological-biblical interpretation that Barth refuses to obtain the Christian truth from anywhere else than from the Christian truth itself as it is revealed by God in Jesus Christ and attested in Holy Scripture. Consequently, anything which has its origin in man, for instance in his structure as a human being (anthropology), in his thinking (philosophy), in his experience (man's religion and culture), is excluded as a source and basis of Barth's theology." *Op. cit.*, p. 43.

⁴⁹Ramm considers the Enlightenment to be the crucial phenomenon which hit Christianity and which Christians are still coming to terms with. "The Enlightenment sent shock waves through Christian theology as nothing did before or after. Theology has never been the same since the Enlightenment. And therefore each and every theology... must assess its relationship to the Enlightenment." *Op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁵⁰Cf. Ramm, *Op. cit.*, pp. 7-8.

⁵¹"He [Barth]... knows that the capitulation of liberal Christianity to the Enlightenment critique of orthodox theology was a fatal piece of theological strategy. Therefore, the only way for theology to survive in the twentieth century is to grant all that which is valid in modern leaning but without the self-defeating strategy of capitulating to it with regard to theology. In other words, Barth *inadvertently* wrote a theology that is a severe criticism of the Enlightenment yet that comes to terms with the positive gains of the Enlightenment." Ramm, p. 15.

⁵²Ramm, p. 14. "Barth is a child of the Enlightenment wherever it represents true learning and genuine progress in knowledge. He is a severe critic of the Enlightenment in its pretensions to final truth, to its perfect harmony with reason, and its criticism of orthodox Christianity." Ramm, p. 14.

⁵³Cf. *The Christian under the Universal Lordship of God the Father*.

⁵⁴III/3/251.

⁵⁵III/3/251.

⁵⁶III/3/251.

⁵⁷III/3/240. Cf. the section on *The Christian under the Universal Lordship of God the Father*.

⁵⁸Rev. 13:8, KJV.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that Calvin begins his *Institutes* with the knowledge of God the Creator as distinct from the knowledge of God the Redeemer. He gains his understanding of the knowledge of God from areas such as the *sensus divinitatis* and the natural world, and his doctrine of providence from a general understanding of scripture. He does not, however, use the knowledge of God revealed in Christ to formulate his doctrine of providence.

Calvin also, despite all his attempts to keep it out, allowed his philosophical and humanist education to colour his doctrine of providence, and used his notion of accommodation to divide God into God in himself and God revealed in Jesus Christ. It is clear that Calvin was no Stoic philosopher, not simply because he fought their influence on Christianity but because he never accepted their pantheism. His understanding of God's transcendence and the Trinity are far from Stoicism. God could never be confused with nature. What is evident, however, is that the humanistic understanding of God is so similar to Calvin's as to make one wonder just how much of Stoicism Calvin unknowingly included in his own theology. He definitely protested against Stoicism. But could he have protested too much? In damning the tide of Stoicism, Calvin allowed it to influence him sufficiently that it provided a kind of soil which would incline him to prefer or have an interest in certain biblical themes to the exclusion of other themes which might have moderated the overall shape

of his doctrine of providence. In all these ways, despite his best instincts, Calvin ended up with a God whose real self is hidden behind a revealed God, thus, the revealed God can never show us who the real God is. Calvin has left himself open to the charge of there being two wills in God, the real God hidden behind the revealed. Not only does this not do justice to the revelation in Christ but it also cannot cope with human freedom, the modern era and all its problems.

Karl Barth stands in the Reformed tradition and thus maintains the sovereignty of God, as does Calvin. Yet, Barth is as post-Copernican and post-Enlightenment as Gilkey. He, too, lived with wars, pogroms, and the threat of nuclear annihilation and diseases. He, too, had to come to grips with the fact that humanity, in the 20th century, is fractured by constant and consistent change. He was all too aware of the modern human experience of a world moving too fast and losing all sense of grounding and control.

Because Barth sees the same world that Gilkey does, he is in a better position to answer Gilkey than Calvin. While standing firmly within the Reformed tradition, Barth is also post-Copernican and post-Enlightenment, and thus has a doctrine of providence which reforms Calvin. He fundamentally agrees with Calvin on the ultimacy of the sovereignty of God, and that no human understanding of God's providence can stem from a human experience of history, from any modern historical consciousness, nor from an experience of change. As Reformed theologians, Barth and Calvin agree that the heart of the Reformed understanding of providence rests upon its conviction that God is sovereign over human affairs and world occurrence generally, guiding and controlling the unfolding of events in such a way as to

bring them to ends which suit his purposes. The providence of God is just that, the providence of God. It stems from and can only be defined by God.

While agreeing with Calvin on the sovereignty of God, Barth is, nevertheless, in a decidedly better position to answer Gilkey than Calvin, and as a result reforms Calvin's doctrine of divine providence. Barth discusses the doctrine of providence with a post-Enlightenment understanding of the human questions concerning history and human existence. Barth's argument concerns the questions, Who is this God whose providence we are discussing? What is the nature of this God? What is the shape of this God's interaction with the cosmos and perhaps more practically, how do we find out about this God? He sees God's revelation in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ -- the one, unique in kind, revelation of God through whom alone humanity gains this knowledge.

It has been said that Barth is both child and critic of the Enlightenment, and it might equally be said that Barth is both child and critic of the Reformation. But for Barth the decision was not to decide between the two as if God and modernity were locked in a pitched battle. Far from Gilkey's conception of the Reformed understanding of God versus modernity, Barth maintains a fundamentally different beginning and reference point from which to construct his model of the Christian faith, and so is equal to the task of reforming the Reformation faith while firmly standing in the modern era. While Calvin reformed the church of the 16th century, Barth reforms Calvin. In so doing, he speaks to modern people.

Barth has shown that Reformed theology must return to its roots,

to Jesus Christ, in order to make sense of this world in this century. In response to Calvin, Barth will not capitulate to divine sovereignty at the expense of human freedom. In response to Gilkey, Barth will not capitulate to human freedom at the expense of divine sovereignty. To capitulate in either direction is to refuse to live within the tension of being a human being created by God. To capitulate to divine sovereignty at the expense of human freedom renders human beings puppets and makes a mockery of their God-given autonomy, their self-government in the midst of relationship. To capitulate to human freedom at the expense of divine sovereignty is to render God superfluous, to knit God in an image to suit ourselves. Again, it is to refuse to live within the tension, the autonomous relationship.

Autonomy, if defined by God and God's own internal relationship, no longer means separation and standing alone. Autonomy exists in relationship. Note that relationship does not mean suffocation or smothering. In God we see none of that. But autonomy in relationship means the complete honouring of the other, such that the other can and does stand as an individual, but never abandoned or disregarded. While indeed, autonomy does mean "self-governing", self-governing", as seen in the Trinity, does not mean three separate gods who stand alone as islands. Autonomy, self-governing, as seen in the Trinity, is a standing-alongside-of, a genuine respect of oneself and the other. It is integrity. The Father respects the Son and Holy Spirit, the Son respects the Father and Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit respects the Father and Son. We see this especially in the Holy Spirit. For on that cross, while the Father was experiencing the death of his son and the Son experiencing death itself, the Holy Spirit knew the pain and

anguish of them both and yet honoured their respective decisions. In the interpenetration within the Trinity the Holy Spirit knew the pain of the Father and Son, yet rather than rescue either, chose to stand alongside both. In the relationship of love existing in the Godhead, the Holy Spirit knew the love of Father for Son, Son for Father, and the love of God for humankind such that Father and Son would endure death on behalf of humanity.

Is the doctrine of providence credible today? Yes. God is alongside us. God creates and respects our autonomy in the midst of relationship and God's power is given to us in our weakness. To be sure, this is a different definition of providence than Calvin gave. Providence is found on the cross of Christ, where God does not intervene in our human, muscle-bound notion of power. Providence is no longer power raised to the highest human degree but is rather a relationship found in the midst of the lost, the least and the last.

Credible? Yes, because providence is not a way of ruling our life-situation but a way of living in situations we do not rule. It sees the broken, human and blood-stained face of reality clearly. The providence of God does not shrink from human reality but dives into it, walking alongside us wherever we walk.

Credible? Yes, not because providence gives answers but because it stands alongside us in our questions. Providence hears, understands and respects our questions. Providence never takes them away from us. Providence will not take our humanity from us.

Credible? Yes, and not in a way which takes our integrity from us. We are created to walk alongside each other as God walks

alongside us, not making each other's decisions but being each other's fellow travellers. Truly Reformed. Truly modern.

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